The Family Business-the Next Generation

Nov. 9, 2011 - Feb. 2, 2012

Made possible by the Barney School of Business, The Entrepreneurial Center, The Center for Professional Development, and the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies
The Museum of Jewish Civilization, founded in 2003, was directed by Dr. Richard A. Freund (2003-2007) and is presently directed by Dr. Avinoam Patt of the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford. DreAnna Hadash serves as guest curator. The Museum of Jewish Civilization is a teaching museum and its primary goal is to tell the story of Jewish civilization for the general and academic communities of Connecticut through exhibitions coordinated with our library collections at the Mortensen Library, our endowed lectureships and coursework in the extensive Judaica offerings of the Greenberg Center.

The Museum’s Singer Gallery has featured exhibits highlighting the history of Jewish interactions with Muslims and Christians; the lives of the Jews in Germany, the United States, Latin America, and ancient Israel, as well as books on and about the Jewish people worldwide and the Holocaust. The Jewish Music section features the Cantorate, highlighting the way Jews used the Arts to express their spirit, while the section on archaeology chronicles the daily and religious life of Ancient Israel.

The Museum is located in Mortensen Library, Harry Jack Gray Center, University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford, CT. For docent led tours and Museum hours, please call 860.768.5729 or email (mgcjs@hartford.edu).
Timeline of the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies

1985 Arnold and Beverly Greenberg create Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies. Arlene Neiditz appointed earlier as acting director and program coordinator. An opening exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum, “The Precious Legacy: Treasures from the Czechoslovak State Collection” and a satellite exhibition of “Art of the Children of Terezin” at the University of Hartford with lectures sponsored by the Greenberg Center. As part of the festivities, a University of Hartford honorary doctorate was given to Elie Weisel, who spoke about the significance of Judaic Studies.

1986 Greenberg Center offers on campus the first series of lectures, seminars, conferences and exhibits: Archaeology, Israeli and Jewish Literature, Holocaust, Soviet Jewry, and Jewish Music. First Yiddish Book acquisitions for Judaica library and establishment of Holocaust Educators Awards by David Chase. Appointment of Dr. Jonathan Rosenbaum as first Director of the Maurice Greenberg Center and Greenberg Professor of Jewish History—the first endowed chair at the University of Hartford. Bachelor of Arts in Judaic Studies coursework established.

1987 Edward Lewis Wallant Award in American Jewish Literature, established by Fran and Irving Waltman in 1962, becomes a part of the Greenberg Center. The Hebrew College-Hartford Branch, CJE and University of Hartford begin joint teaching of Hebrew and coursework for university and community at the Greenberg Center. Hank Lebed appointed first Chair of the Greenberg Center Board of Visitors, Vice Chairs: Simon Konover and Danny Neiditz

1990 Millie and Irving Bercowitz Judaica Library Collection at the UHart Mortensen Library established

1992 Philip D. Feltman appointed second Chair of the Board of Visitors of the Greenberg Center


1996 The Henry Luce Forum in Abrahamic Religions with the Hartford Seminary established

The UConn-UHart Master of Arts in Judaic Studies Consortium established

"From the Ends of Earth: Judaic Treasures from the Library of Congress" exhibit at Uhart

1998 Arnold Greenberg named UHart Chair of the Board of Regents

1999 Dr. Richard Freund appointed second Director of Greenberg Center and Maurice Greenberg Professor of Jewish History.

2000 Historic Trip to Israel with Board of Regents Chair, Arnold Greenberg and President Walter Harrison to meet with Pope John Paul II and open the Bethsaida Archaeological Park in Galilee. Fifteenth Anniversary Celebration: Keynote by Dr. Richard Freund and World Premiere of Public Television documentary, “Return to the Cave of Letters.”

2002 Paula Steinberg appointed third Chair of the Board of Visitors of the Greenberg Center

2003 Establishment of the Museum of Jewish Civilization

2006 20th Anniversary Gala honoring Philip D. Feltman with new professorship in his honor.

2007 Dr. Avinoam Patt appointed Philip D. Feltman Professor of Modern Jewish History and Assistant Director of the Greenberg Center

2008 Naomi Cohen appointed fourth Chair of Greenberg Center Board of Visitors

2010 “Something From Nothing” A New Yiddish Opera for Children Premiere

“Faces of a Nation” Minnie Goldenberg Exhibition in the Sherman Museum

“A Picture is Worth a Thousand Swords: The Art of Arthur Szyk and Dr. Seuss” The New Britain Museum of American Art and the Sherman Museum

2011 25th Anniversary Gala honoring Arnold and Beverly Greenberg with keynote by Wolf Blitzer

Opening of “The Family Business-The Next Generation”
The Greenberg Center and the Family Business

The University of Hartford has prided itself on its tradition of being a private university with a public purpose. On the occasion of its 25th anniversary, the Greenberg Center spent six months writing about the history of the Center – its origins, its development, its impact and its involvement with the Greater Hartford community. In the 25 years of the Greenberg Center, the Center’s community division has been dedicated not only to teaching and learning for the students and faculty of the University of Hartford but to serving the greater community at the same time. Much of this work for the community has been made possible through the generous support of our donors and thus we decided to create an exhibition and symposium that would investigate those family businesses that have sustained the Greenberg Center over the past 25 years through their generous philanthropic endeavors, through their dedication to the wider community, and through their commitment to a business model that included serving the community, in much the same way that the University and the Greenberg Center have served our community. In a sense, the University of Hartford and the Greenberg Center has always felt that it is a “Family Business” which serves the greater needs of the extended family of Greater Hartford.

The Family Business in American Jewish History

The Family Business is one of the central pillars of American business. The history of the family businesses in the industrial age is interwoven with the stories of large families who sought economic freedom for themselves and their families in the elite frameworks of business that were changing in the Industrial Revolution. Jews, who for centuries were shut out of guilds and many different businesses in Europe and the Middle East naturally made family businesses a hallmark of Jewish entrepreneurship. The ability to move from generation to generation of family members allowed banking houses like the Rothschilds, for example, to establish a sense of trust and shared values, while maintaining the international networks necessary to thrive. Family businesses were well known in the United States in the 19th century when large numbers of Jewish immigrants arrived on these shores both in search of economic opportunity and in order to escape anti-Semitism and persecution in Europe. They found welcoming areas in the United States in communities large and small, urban and rural, which allowed them to ply their ingenuity and their hard work. Many of the major businesses founded by Jewish immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries began with peddlers who moved from carts, to store fronts to factories within one generation. Some of the most recognizable names in American business (Marcus Goldman, a peddler in Philadelphia in 1848; Meyer Guggenheim, a peddler in New York and Philadelphia in 1848; Henry Lehman, a peddler in Alabama in 1844; Lazarus Strauss, a peddler in Georgia in the 1850s) all began their careers in the same way before eventually founding the largest commodities brokerages, department stores, and business conglomerates in American history. Jewish immigrants were drawn to businesses that required little start-up capital, allowed for religious freedom and independence, and could involve the entire family. Likewise, the
Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who came to dominate the garment businesses of New York City at the turn of the 20th century, worked together as families, before sending their children to school or to open new businesses as entrepreneurs willing to take risks far smaller than the risk of uprooting one’s life in Europe to begin anew in the “golden land” of the United States. Many of the stories that we will feature here start with a patriarch or matriarch who first made the journey from Europe and established a business based upon some of the basic economic principles of Adam Smith or the dramatic rags to riches novels of Horatio Alger or Abraham Cahan in *The Rise of David Levinsky*.

A study of the Family Business also allows for an examination of the business through generations of witnesses who have served as the principals in the development of the business from origins and evolution. Through this exhibition in the Museum of Jewish Civilization, the Greenberg Center focuses upon seven family businesses that have been intimately connected through their philanthropic work in the community and specifically to the Greenberg Center and the University of Hartford. The seven businesses of the catalogue were developed from hundreds of small and large businesses that are all connected with the philanthropic work of the family business and the next generation. The exhibition catalogue and symposium explore why these businesses remained so committed to the vision of the founders in their continuation of the philanthropic vision and how this might have been a part of their founding business models as well. In these pages we will explore some of the most compelling of the many different stories of family businesses and their relationship to the communities that they came from and the communities that they helped to shape. The businesses are:

- COLECO (Connecticut Leather Company)
- COPACO (Connecticut Packing Company)
- The Simon Konover Company
- Message Center Management, Inc.
- Puritan Furniture
- Viking Fuel Oil Company
- Radkowsky Thorium Power Corporation (RTPC) and the Lightbridge Corporation

Our thanks to the Greenberg, Bercowetz, Konover, Zachs, Singer, Steinberg, and Grae families who gave us permission to use these photos and feature their family histories in the exhibition.
Today, as always, businesses must continually reinvent themselves to stay relevant in a changing economy. The way only to remain successful in business is to embrace the flow of change. Business owners must cultivate a flexible attitude because being resistant to change can be a death knell.

Business reinvention is particularly relevant today as new industries arise, previously dominant behemoths fade away, and markets change with seemingly ever increasing fluidity and speed. Structural changes are remaking markets and reconstituting the value of assets. As consumer habits, technology, and the economic climate change, these market shifts make it possible for alternative solutions to create value in new ways.

Reinvention is not about reacting to a crisis. It’s about adjusting to changes in the marketplace in order to stay relevant. It’s about recognizing opportunities and repositioning to change a company’s market potential. It’s about diverting resources from yesterday’s product line to tomorrow’s prospects. It is about understanding the changing reality of customers so that you can anticipate emerging trends and implement responsive business models in a timely fashion. It’s about challenging assumptions and embracing new paradigm, even when it’s far afield from what you have been doing.

Successful businesses create new and more productive uses for their assets by selectively eliminating and creating their products and services, reconsidering their market focus or their way of producing, updating their current business models and looking at completely different industries. A new focus brings with it challenges that require owners to adapt their thinking, be willing to break with tradition, take chances and realign resources.

The entrepreneurs who are the focus of The Family Business Symposium are great examples of the reinvention process and the adaptive thinking it requires.

These second and third generation entrepreneurs successfully transitioned into the new economy by abandoning outdated strategies and employing new alternatives for their companies. Inspired by their histories, and standing upon the foundation provided by the previous generations, they injected fresh insights that allowed their family businesses to continue to thrive.
Maurice Greenberg, center and his two sons, (L) Arnold and (R) Leonard

Coleco was founded in 1932 by Maurice Greenberg as the “Connecticut Leather Company.” Maurice was a Russian immigrant who came to Hartford in 1932. Coleco originally sold machinery and shoe repair supplies such as heels, nails, laces, and polish, which later led to a business in leather craft kits in the 1950s. In 1956, Coleco expanded into plastic products, producing wading pools, toys, and sleds. The leather part of the business was sold off in the 1960s as Coleco became the largest manufacturer of above ground swimming and wading pools. At the same time, the company began to acquire manufacturers of toys and games in the United States and Canada.
The company entered the video game business with Telstar in 1976. They transitioned next into handheld electronic games. Coleco produced two very popular lines of games, the “Head to Head” series of two player sports games, (Football, Basketball, Soccer, Hockey) and the series of licensed video mini-arcade titles such as Donkey Kong and Pac Man. A third line of educational handhelds was also produced and included the Electronic Learning Machine, Lil Genius, Digits, and a trivia game called QuizWhiz.
Two of Coleco’s most popular hand-held video games, Pac-Man and Head to Head Football.

The ColecoVision programmable video game system

Coleco developed a programmable video game system in 1982 with the launch of ColecoVision, which fulfilled the promise of being “The Arcade in Your Home!” In 1983, ColecoVision became the top selling home video game console. As early interest in home computers began to develop in 1983-84, Coleco introduced the ADAM home computer. Although it was a revolutionary new product that combined a video game system with a printer and computer at a $600 price, production delays and early software problems proved to be very costly. The full potential of ADAM was never realized.

At the same time, however, Coleco brought to market the Cabbage Patch Kids series of dolls, which were wildly successful for several years. Other popular products were introduced during this period and Coleco made a major acquisition of the well-known Japanese toy company, TOMY. Coleco’s capital structure was weakened in the 1980s, largely due to the ADAM disappointment. The market crash of 1987 disrupted Coleco’s public financing plans and
adequate bank financing was not available. In 1988, the company filed for reorganization under the bankruptcy code, resulting in senior management changes.

Arnold Greenberg and Cabbage Patch Dolls at the University of Hartford, ca. 1984

The philanthropic role of Coleco and especially its leadership, Arnold Greenberg and Leonard Greenberg are a part of this saga. Arnold Greenberg is a former Chairman and CEO of Coleco Industries, Inc., like his brother, Leonard, before him. The Greenbergs have been extremely involved with philanthropic work that spans the Jewish and non-Jewish world. Arnold endowed the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford in 1985. Leonard, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Trinity College in Hartford, created the Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College in 1996 to advance knowledge and understanding of the varied roles that religious movements, institutions, and ideas play in the contemporary world.

Arnold Greenberg’s board service and philanthropy includes the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, the Jewish Community Foundation, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art and Hartford Stage in the Greater Hartford area. He has also served on many national boards of organizations. Arnold has been a Chairman of the Board of the Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts and also the Board of Regents of the University Of Hartford. He is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Harvard College and also a graduate of Harvard Law School. Leonard helped to establish the Hillel Society while at Trinity and served as a presidential appointee to the U.S. Holocaust Museum Council, on the board of the Jewish Museum in New York City, and as a governor on the American Jewish Committee. Both Greenbergs have received honorary degrees: Arnold from the University of Hartford and Leonard from Trinity College.
Barely 10% of all family businesses continue into the third generation. Copaco is a family business located in Bloomfield, Connecticut that represents a study in multi-generational business vision that successfully adapted to change.

The story of Copaco began in 1905 when Kalman Bercowetz immigrated to the United States from Minsk (then part of the Russian Empire). After landing at Ellis Island, Kalman worked as a butcher in the meatpacking district of New York City on the future site of the United Nations. However Kalman’s dream was to have his own farm, something he had not been able to achieve in Russia where Jews were forbidden to be property owners. In 1909, Kalman brought his wife, Rebecca Magadovitch, to their new home in Bloomfield, a nearly 400 acre farm where Copaco is located today. They settled into a rural lifestyle and began a family that would grow to include three sons and two daughters.

Kalman’s original vision of the family business came out of a need to move inventory. His small herd of dairy cattle also provided meat for the family and when he had excess beef, Kalman began to sell it to city-dwellers from Hartford who traveled on a horse drawn trolley, their empty flour sacks in hand, to the hinterlands of Bloomfield to buy fresh meat.

The second change to the original vision was the result of external forces. The Great Depression had begun and Kalman had three sons who needed work. Using his precious land as collateral, Kalman borrowed money in 1932 to build a meat-packing plant that he named the Connecticut Packing Company.
The Second Generation: Irving Bercowetz

The fourth child of Kalman and Rebecca Bercowetz, Irving was raised on the family farm, working alongside his father and brothers. In 1936, he married Mildred Fleishman and left the family to open his own business, buying and selling hogs. Irving’s new venture flourished but when World War II began and his brothers joined the Army, Irving returned to help his father keep the family business running until they returned. In 1947, Irving, his father Kalman, his brothers Max and Herman, and his brother-in-law, Israel Rosenthal, incorporated the Connecticut Packing Company, which had expanded to include a small retail meat company as well as a smokehouse and sausage kitchen producing their own line of processed and smoked meats, cheese, hot dogs, and a no-water added ham. Now the family business vision began to include not just wholesale production but retail distribution and would soon create the proto-type for the modern “shopping center.”

After the Korean War, Irving helped develop a portion of the family farm into the Bloomfield’s first industrial zone, the Granby Street Industrial Park. The business now included several small buildings housing a retail meat store, a produce stand, a grocery store featuring frozen foods (a post-war development) and the Mr. Frankee hot dog stand. In 1966, with funds from the Granby Street land sale, Irving and the family opened the 40,000 square foot “Copaco” (an anagram for Connecticut Packing Company) supermarket, the largest store of its kind in the state at that time.
Kalman passed away in 1970, but his sons, Max, Herman and Irving along with Irving’s brother-in law, Izzy Rosenthal, went on to take Kalman’s vision from a country meat store and packing company to a place where shoppers could experience all of the elements of what would later be called a “shopping mall.”

The Copaco Supermarket (1960s)

Third Generation: Bonnie Bercowetz

By the 1970s, Irving wanted to expand the sausage kitchen and open additional supermarkets to both distribute their product in a wider area and compete with the supermarket chains beginning to open nearby. Several members of the third generation joined the company at that time,
including Irving’s daughter, Bonnie. In 1975, Bonnie, the would-be American Studies professor, was persuaded to become a member of Copaco’s fledgling management training program. This group would provide leadership for the additional stores being planned. However, desirable sites were not found and in 1978, instead of opening a new store, Copaco doubled the size of its Bloomfield location to nearly 80,000 square feet.

By the early 1980’s, the business vision of the second generation was becoming less and less viable. Supermarket chains had flooded the area and Copaco’s single store business model was hard-pressed to compete, despite the fact that the center now included a Zayre’s (later to be an Ames), McDonalds, Copaco’s own specialty wine and liquor store and 30 other local and national tenants. By this point, Bonnie and her husband, Paul Klopp, were involved in most aspects of the company and their cousin, Alan Rosenthal, managed the produce department and later the liquor store. The rest of the third generation had moved onto other professions.

In the mid-80’s, the third generation began to develop its own business vision. Real estate was booming and the next generation did not want to own manufacturing and retail stores, they wanted to develop sites for them. The wholesale meat-packing and sausage kitchen were sold in 1983. And in 1986, one of Copaco’s prime competitors, Waldbaum’s, became the shopping center’s new anchor tenant. This fundamental change in the company’s development was difficult for the second generation to embrace, but they now made their last major contribution to the future of the family business. Irving and his partners developed that essential business tool, a transition and succession plan that would eventually place control of the company in the hands of their children.

Alan continued to manage the last retail piece of the company, Copaco liquors, while Bonnie and Paul, along with a family board comprised of both second and third generations, moved the family business to its final phase. When frontage in the shopping center was taken by eminent domain in the 1990’s for the widening of Cottage Grove road, Bonnie convinced the second generation to reinvest that money in a renovation and expansion of the shopping center. The senior partners agreed and when Copaco Center was sold in 2005 it included over 500,000 square feet of national and local retailers anchored by a Super Stop & Shop, Burlington Coat Factory, and Lowes.

A tireless worker and passionate caretaker of his family business, Irving was president of the company until he passed away in 2002. His passing was followed by Izzy in 2005 and Herman in 2009, but the business and philanthropic legacy of the Bercowetz and Rosenthal families lives on. Over the years, Copaco provided thousands of jobs and was often the first work experience for Bloomfield teen-agers. Copaco created a series of opportunities for industries to grow during the post-World War II era that to this day provide the community with a well-balanced tax base of commercial and residential development. Kalman donated land for and was one of the founders of the Beth Hillel synagogue (their Hebrew school is named in his honor). Second and third generation family members were actively involved in Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce. For many years, Copaco funded a little league team and Copaco could always be
counted on to provide space in its parking lot for any local group wanting to hold a fund-raiser. The Bloomfield Citizenship Award (given to a high school senior) was created by Belle (Bercowetz) and her husband Morris, Cutler. The Blue Hills Fire District’s first ambulance was donated by Copaco. And for nearly forty years, Copaco provided organs for animal research that were used in the agriculture, medical and dental schools at the University of Connecticut, and at local universities and hospitals such as Yale, Amherst, Hartford Hospital, St. Francis, and Pfizer. Millie and Irving Bercowetz were generous donors to the Hartt School for the Performing Arts and helped fund the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies. The Bloomfield Chamber’s Oliver Filley Service Award was presented to both Irving and his daughter, Bonnie, in recognition of their personal and professional contributions to Bloomfield’s business communities.
Simon Konover was born in a small town in the Warsaw province of Poland in 1922. The saga that brought Mr. Konover, a Holocaust survivor and refugee, and his family to the pinnacle of the real estate, development, and construction business is one of resilience, luck, hard work, and perseverance. Mr. Konover’s story begins with him growing up with seven brothers and sisters in a shtetl in the Polish town of Makow Mazowiecki. At the outbreak of World War II, there were about 3,500 Jews in Makow Mazowiecki. Aged 16 at the time of the German occupation, he recalls waking up one morning to see German tanks, trucks, and motorcycles in the town, with a warning for Jews not to go outside. “That’s when life changed…like upside down for me.” Immediately, he was conscripted for forced labor, cleaning streets and gutters, and two weeks later sent to perform agricultural work at a labor farm, harvesting food for the Wehrmacht (the German army). Realizing that survival in such an environment was unlikely, he and seven others decided to attempt an escape from the forced labor camp; he was one of three to survive the escape and returned home to Makow Mazowiecki. When it became clear that he would soon be caught again by the Gestapo, his parents convinced him to “get away” along with his younger brother (an older brother had been captured and taken as a POW by the Russian Army at the beginning of the war.) He ran away with his younger brother, but his brother quickly decided to return home, leaving Simon to continue the journey to the Russian side 40km away on his own (he never saw his younger brother or parents again). He reunited with his other brother in the town of Lomza (under Soviet occupation) and together they found work in the town, before they were forced to relocate to Pinsk by the Russian authorities. In June 1941, the Germans launched Operation Barbarossa and invaded the Soviet Union; Simon and his brother fled all the way to Stalingrad where he was conscripted to fight in the Red Army. He ended up working primarily as a truck driver, assigned to deliver ammunition to soldiers on the front lines. During the Battle of Stalingrad, he witnessed the horrible brutality of the war and the scenes of extreme starvation and suffering by soldiers and civilians alike. Simon was charged with disobeying orders and sentenced to three years of hard labor in the Siberian gulag. The harsh punishment ended up saving Simon's life, as his former convoy was destroyed by German fighter planes. When the war was over in the Soviet Union, Simon managed to reunite with his brother in Stalingrad, who he had not seen in eleven months. They managed to contact an older half-brother named David (from his father’s first marriage) who assisted them in leaving Paris after the war in order to begin the journey to New York City. Simon ended up spending eleven months in Cuba before finally managing to reach Hartford, CT where his older brother had moved after the Depression. With virtually no money, Simon and his brother, Harold, eventually made it to America with the help of David. David owned a flooring company, and he put Simon to work. From there, it was all upward — as a supervisor, then starting his own companies in West Hartford. In the decades that followed, he built one of the most successful development companies in the United States, encompassing hotels, office buildings, apartments
and more than 100 shopping centers. From nothing he created a mammoth company that has developed and operated more than 200 properties in 17 states along the East Coast and Midwest. In 1957, the Simon Konover Company began with the construction of a Carville’s Motel with 33 rooms. Thirty-five years later he donated the motel to the Hartford Jewish Federation.

Carville’s Motor Lodge

In over 50 years of business, Simon Konover has established a real estate organization based upon integrity, hard work and a commitment to excellence. Throughout its history, The Simon Konover Company gained national recognition as an entrepreneurial organization establishing industry benchmarks for service and success. Over the years, the company has developed, constructed, owned, and managed an extensive portfolio of shopping centers, hotels, residential communities, office properties, industrial buildings, mixed use and specialty properties concentrated throughout the Midwest and Eastern regions of the United States. Today, that experience supports a multi-faceted privately-held real estate company with a reputation for success and innovation recognized throughout the industry. The Simon Konover Company operates across multiple market segments providing real estate development, construction, property acquisition, asset management, property management, leasing and ownership. The company owns and acquires real estate, invests in and develops new opportunities and provides property/asset management services for third party clients as well as Konover-related properties.

The Konover family has also created an impressive record of philanthropy through its success. Simon Konover’s motto when it comes to philanthropy is “If I am able to make more money, I’ll be able to give more away.” Simon and Doris Konover are founders of the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., and he is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Prime Minister’s New Life Award from the National Committee for Israel Bonds. The
Konovers are founding supporters of the University of Connecticut Center for Judaic Studies and Contemporary Jewish Life, where they endowed the center’s first faculty chair. He has worked with the late actor Paul Newman, donating construction services to build the Hole in the Wall camp in Ashford, CT. At the University of Hartford, the Konover Campus Center bears the family name, as does the Simon and Doris Konover Arts wing of the Mandell Jewish Community Center.

The Simon Konover Company, Celebrating 50 Years
The Family Business: Pioneering an Entire Industry

Message Center: Wireless Communications and the Zachs Family

Henry and Eric Zachs are a father and son team that has pioneered an industry which is at the center of our 21st century interconnected existence – telecommunications.

In 1960, Message Center Telephone Answering Service was conceived. In 1961, Henry Zachs, received his first mobile telephone license and in 1970 received his first paging license. Mobile telephones were the precursor to modern day cellular service. From 1970 to 1995 he served as CEO of Message Center Beepers until the company was sold to Airtouch (Vodafone) in the largest transaction for a private paging company. In 1978, he was one of eleven founders of a pre-cellular service and in 1982 the same parties received one of the two cellular licenses, which were awarded to New York City. The company, Cellular Service Inc., (Cellular One) is now part of AT&T, serving New York City. In the 1980s, he pioneered the concept of Indian tribes as their own nations able to secure cellular licenses. This concept enabled many tribes to enter the cellular business. Today, he serves as the president of Zafa Towers, LLC, and chief executive officer of Message Center Management.

As an undergraduate student in the Trinity College Class of 1956, Zachs pursued multiple activities including Hillel, the Democratic Club, and the Political Science Club, and served as managing editor of the yearbook, The Ivy. Zachs received his M.B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School.

Eric, who received a B.A. from Tufts University in 1981 and a J.D. from Columbia University School of Law in 1985, joined Message Center Beepers in 1989 when the company had 35,000 pagers. As COO, Eric revamped sales and customer service and launched Ready Beeper, which was the first retail-paging offering in the United States. Under his guidance, the business grew to 350,000 units in 1995. In 1993, Henry and Eric co-founded Message Center Management, Inc, a cellular tower business. Today, Message Center Management, Inc. is one of the nation’s leading providers of wireless communication antenna sites and serves as a complete resource for wireless antenna sites. The country’s leaders in the wireless networking industry rely on MCM to identify and deliver the right rooftop, tower, and alternate site locations to help them provide full coverage for their customers.
In 1995, Eric founded ZipLink, Inc. with the mission to be the industry leader in providing wholesale Internet connectivity solutions to the business-to-business marketplace. In 2004, Eric formed and remains the Managing Partner of Bantry Bay Ventures-Asia, a private equity firm focusing on China and Vietnam. In this capacity Eric serves as Chairman of the Board of Shanxi Taiyue Coal Trading and Transportation Co., Ltd. and as a Board member of ARC China, which invests in a variety of consumer businesses in China.

Most recently, Henry and Eric combined their wireless and international experience and co-founded Torrecom Partners, LLC, a Latin American cell tower company focused on Mexico, Central America, and Chile.

As impressive as their record of leadership in technology and wireless communications is, the dedication of the Zachs family to philanthropy in Greater Hartford and around the country is perhaps even more impressive. Henry Zachs’s community involvement has included serving as President of the Greater Hartford Jewish Federation, Trustee of Trinity College and Williston Northampton School and as a Director of the United Way and the Florence Griswold Museum. Zachs has been named recipient of the Harold Grinspoon Award for Excellence in Jewish Education Lay Leader Award for 2009 by the Hebrew High School of New England. In 2008, the National Conference for Community and Justice awarded Zachs its Human Relations Award, which recognizes high standards of responsible citizenship and leadership in promoting principles of tolerance and understanding within diverse communities. At Trinity, he received the Highest Alumni Honor, the Eigenbrodt Cup Award. One of greater Hartford's most prolific
philanthropists, Henry Zachs, has helped make possible the Zachs Hillel House at Trinity and the newly built Trachten-Zachs Hillel House at the University of Connecticut. He is currently a director or trustee of the following organizations: Connecticut Institute for the Blind, Oak Hill Foundation, Connecticut Historical Society, Ados Israel Synagogue, The Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hebrew High School of New England, Solomon Schechter Day School, Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, The Bushnell, Watkinson Library, Trinity College Hillel, University of Hartford Hillel and University of Connecticut Hillel. He currently is Co-Chairman of Major Gifts for the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford and a member of its board. The campus upon which Hebrew Health Care, the Mandell JCC, and the new Community Services Building of the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford site, was renamed the Zachs Campus in recognition of the Zachs family’s generous gift to Hartford’s Community Capital Campaign, which Henry Zachs co-chaired. While he is a generous benefactor to many organizations and agencies, and sits on several nonprofit boards, Zachs is especially attentive to the needs of the local Jewish community. In addition, for years he has led in the effort to clean up and maintain the many aging Jewish cemeteries in the Hartford area through his leadership of the Association of Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Hartford, which works to provide proper care and ongoing maintenance in perpetuity to cemeteries. He donated the Swim & Racquet Club to the Mandell Jewish Community Center.

Eric Zachs has continued this dedication to the Greater Hartford Jewish Community, serving as past president of both the Mandell Jewish Community Center of Greater Hartford and the Hartford Dispensary (providing substance abuse care for the indigent). He is the Regional Chair of the Anti-Defamation League and serves on the boards of the St. Francis Hospital Foundation, Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford and Solomon Schechter Day School among other organizations. In 2008, the Zachs family received the ADL Torch of Liberty Award recognizing their multigenerational commitment to philanthropy and the community.
William Singer came to Connecticut at the age of 13 as an immigrant from Ruvno, Poland. By the time he passed away in 1989 (still at work, 63 years later) he had built one of the most successful furniture businesses in Connecticut and Connecticut’s largest furniture store, Puritan Furniture. When he first came to Connecticut, Singer found work in the tobacco fields. He soon began work as an upholsterer (coincidentally working for William Zachs (Henry’s father) at Allyn upholstery) and, at the age of 18, started the Superior Upholstery Co. at 1041 New Britain Avenue in the Elmwood section of West Hartford in 1932. As he later recalled in an interview celebrating the 25th anniversary of the business, “when we started, we had five employees. Those were Depression days.” In 1938, he expanded the upholstery business, supplying dealers up and down the eastern seaboard. Singer opened the retail store, Puritan Furniture Mart in 1942, expanding the selling space of the store each year for many years. In 1955, a new warehouse and factory outlet was opened at 1061 New Britain Avenue, and the firm eventually expanded to a 5-acre showroom in Elmwood and outlets in Wethersfield and Rocky Hill. As president of Puritan Furniture, Mr. Singer remained active, working seven days a week, and devoted to his attention to provide people with personal attention and quality. His son, Bruce, has continued to operate Puritan Furniture, and the Singer family has continued William’s legacy of outstanding customer service and dedication to numerous philanthropic causes in Greater Hartford.

Puritan Furniture, like many of the other family businesses of immigrants, identified the needs of the community and recognized that the success of their businesses was due in large part to the general community. This was Puritan’s first and second generation promise. To do well in the community they had to do good and to do good, they have performed charitable acts in the
community. Puritan’s contributions are across the region and in the city of Hartford. Furniture, gifts and other philanthropic deeds of kindness that have included support for the following: the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, Yale University Cancer Center, the Wellness Community – Gilda’s Club, the Ronald McDonald House in Springfield, Mass., The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, Ct., the Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford, the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Hartford, family assistance organizations including Hartford are shelters, the Mandell Jewish Community Center of Greater Hartford, the Chabad Jewish Center, Hebrew Home and Health Care, West Hartford Library, Elmwood Senior Center, and the congestive heart failure unit at St. Francis Hospital. This support in the community has also included of course, the University of Hartford and the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies, especially with the annual Lillian Singer Jewish Humor Lecture and the William Singer Gallery at The Museum of Jewish Civilization at the University which has featured exhibitions from around the world.

In the words of Puritan’s founders:

“When we started in the retail furniture business back in 1931, we determined a policy then and have carried it through diligently ever since. That policy is...sell only the finest quality furniture...have it in depth so that our customers can take delivery right from our huge warehouse stock...back up every sale with prompt service...keep the prices lower than the competition.”

In the words of Puritan today:

“Puritan has grown over the years due to our commitment to our customers. People come into our showrooms and are literally astonished by the tremendous selection of furniture for any possible size room or home. Our customers are impressed with our frank, no-nonsense approach to furniture. Puritan meets the needs of today's customer with enthusiasm. We are serving second and third generation customers from families that keep coming back for our fantastic selection and unbeatable prices. Just look and see what we have to offer!

Puritan gives you the individual attention you won't find at chain retailers. Many of our customers buy here because their parents did and they too appreciate the quality, low price and selection Puritan has to offer!”
William and Lillian Singer

Bruce Singer
The Family Business

Viking Fuel Oil Company: Eighty Years of Heating Homes

Viking Fuel Oil Company is a full service company based in West Hartford CT, offering heating, plumbing, and air conditioning services, along with home delivery of heating oil. Viking Fuel Oil remains family-owned, with a focus on customer service and community issues.

Founded in 1933 by Israel Steinberg, son Lewis joined in 1970, building the business to over 10,000 customers and a fleet of 12 oil delivery trucks. Viking, committed to community service, is a proud sponsor of many community organizations including The Hartford Symphony Orchestra, the Mark Twain House, The Bushnell Center for Performing Arts, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, the Greater Hartford Arts Council, the University of Hartford, and the Charter Oak Cultural Center, just to name a few. Community and service were the main part
of the vision of Lewis Steinberg and when he continued as the second generation of this family business. The modernization process and branching out to the ancillary services such as plumbing and air conditioning have kept pace with a very volatile market in heating oil.

Upon his marriage to Margery (a marketing professor at the University of Hartford) in 1978, Lewis learned a lot about marketing from her expertise. He decided that “non-profit means big profit” for a small business. Instead of expensive ads in the local press, Lewis decided that corporate sponsorship and community support would be an appropriate vehicle for getting his company recognized. Viking is proud to sponsor many excellent causes, from health care, to the arts, to community youth sports, to various religious groups and youth and community services of all kinds. Of the many sponsorships, Lewis is most proud of the scholarship he created to fund Greenberg Center students to participate in the archeological opportunities in Israel and beyond. He has also supported the Barney School Upper Albany Project as well as the Hartt School programs; and was a founding member of the Hartford Scholars Program. Thus, his philanthropy has been related to community support, and he remains the oldest privately held heating and air conditioning company in the Greater Hartford area.
The Family Business -- Pioneers and Visionaries

The Early History of Radkowsky Thorium Power Corporation (RTPC)

Alvin Radkowsky Ph.D.                             Joel B. Grae
Founded Inventor and Chief Scientist     Founding President and Chairman

In October 1991 Dr. Alvin Radkowsky met with Joel B. Grae, an American entrepreneur, at his home in Harrison, New York, at the suggestion of a friend and business colleague, Joseph Sauerhoff. Dr. Radkowsky was a nuclear engineer with the US Atomic Energy Commission, Office of Naval Reactors. He was the Chief American scientist under Admiral Hyman Rickover, for the design of the nuclear naval ships and submarines including the Nautilus from 1950 to 1972. Dr. Radkowsky also headed the design team for the building the world’s first commercial nuclear power plant which was located at Shippingport, Pa. which used thorium to generate nuclear power. He moved to Israel in 1973 and was a Professor of Nuclear Engineering at Tel Aviv and Ben Gurion Universities until his death in 2002.

Dr. Radkowsky told Grae that he had designed the first substantial nuclear breakthrough in 50 years by providing a truly non-proliferative nuclear energy option that could eliminate and ameliorate many of the risks associated with nuclear energy by substantially reducing nuclear waste. Radkowsky had developed a path-breaking technology that would make it impossible to develop a nuclear weapon from the waste products of nuclear plants. Dr. Radkowsky requested funding to complete his research. The meeting with Dr. Radkowsky took place in 1991, a mere five years after Chernobyl. At this time nuclear energy was clearly out of favor and no new nuclear plants had been built in the United States following the Three Mile accident in 1979 and the Chernobyl meltdown in 1986.
Joel Grae, however, saw things differently and quickly bought into Dr. Radkowsky’s vision and expanded on it. He felt that the Arab boycott of 1973 and the monopoly power of OPEC were facts of life that would affect the national security of the United States and the world to come for years. Grae and his colleague Karl Milde recalled a feeling of hope and belief as they set in motion a new company based on a new technology that provided a hope for generating safe, clean electric power from an almost unlimited source of energy (abundant thorium) that produced only minimal levels of nuclear waste and no greenhouse gases. In 1991 global warming was a minor issue. Grae, an amateur astronomer, had studied the greenhouse effect on the planet Venus, where the surface temperatures could melt lead. He asked “what will happen when India, China and Russia industrialize? Will we be able to control greenhouse gases, or is Venus or something like it, our fate?” Safe nuclear power seemed to be the answer. The International Atomic Energy Meeting in Vienna in the summer of 1997 reiterated these concerns in a statement: “The three most pressing technical problems of the international community are controlling the world’s climate, providing the huge amounts of energy needed to improve the living standard of the growing world population, and avoiding the use of weapons of mass destruction.” The philanthropic goal of substantially eliminating the nuclear threat was a primary goal of the company from its beginning.

Grae called on Milde to provide the option agreement for Radkowsky’s technology and then arranged the initial funding for what became known as Radkowsky Thorium Power Corporation (RTPC). It was a story of leaps of faith, close calls and most of all vision and tenacity. The story is one of raising substantial funding, working long hours and cooperation between numerous individuals all in pursuit of a vision and challenge that could change the world.

There were numerous disappointments in these early days; some turned out to be blessings. The initial Radkowsky patent applications were rejected by the U.S. patent office when it turned out Dr. Radkowsky had filed a patent application in Israel. Although he withdrew it, this turned out to be fortuitous. Dr. Radkowsky dropped the concept of a separate thorium reactor and developed a thorium blanket fuel rod that could be installed in a nuclear reactor much like a cassette in a music video. This was a formidable task, first thought to be impossible.

Dr. Radkowsky using the same principle, then developed technology using a thorium blanket to burn plutonium and create electricity, while at the same time eliminating the plutonium. Never before had this concept been ever been thought of, much less implemented. This impossible dream had the support and belief of all of the early participants, without whose relentless efforts the project could not have progressed. The company also dedicated itself to develop technology to be used to safeguard the environment. The company had its failures and success stories as the early research progressed and changed, but it was always about finding the “better solution”, one that could provide the groundwork for a future with safe energy. Grae felt that it was worth the effort and put together a Board of Directors with a similar vision.

The Board members were the “Pioneers and Visionaries” whose support, trust and commitment made a crucial difference in the early stage development of the company. Besides Joel B. Grae
and Alvin Radkowsky; Board Members Royce Flippin, Seth Grae, H. Walter Haeussler, Karl Milde Jr., and G. Harold Welch Jr. should be acknowledged. They kept the company alive during the difficult years by setting up the funding activities, arranging for the Kurchatov Institute in Russia to do the research work with Dr. Radkowsky in the development of the Thorium based fuel rods; the filing and securing of patent applications, and coordinating activities with Brookhaven National Laboratory. They were the unsung heroes who believed in the concept and the ideal of creating a non-proliferative nuclear fuel no matter how difficult the challenge.

**Russian Research Center, Kurchatov Institute**

Lead Nuclear consultant Reimer Duerr, Sr. Engineer of Raytheon Engineers and Constructors and lead Consultant, was largely responsible for securing the services of the Kurchatov Institute in Russia in order facilitate the development, design and testing of the thorium based fuel rods. The Kurchatov Institute was named after Igor Kurchatov, the father of the atom bomb in the USSR. It is one of the most prestigious institutions in Russia dealing with nuclear matters and it had expertise in the use of thorium. Seth Grae, Joel’s son, was instrumental in coordinating the research relationship with the Kurchatov Institute and Dr. Radkowsky’s designs in order to develop a non-proliferative nuclear fuel. He assumed the responsibilities of President in 1997, when his father became Chairman. Joel Grae retired from the company in 2000 in order to work on his other entrepreneurial projects.
Seth Grae is the current President and CEO, of Lightbridge Corporation, with company offices in McLean, VA. Under his tenure the RTPC Company name was changed to Thorium Power Inc., the leading developer of non-proliferative nuclear fuel technology and provider of comprehensive advisory services. In September of 2009 the name was subsequently changed to Lightbridge Corporation prior to going public on the Nasdaq exchange October 9, 2009. During Seth Grae’s tenure, Lightbridge has evolved into a leader in developing advanced nuclear fuel technologies and a provider of advisory services to developing and existing nuclear energy programs that meet the highest international standards of safety, non-proliferation, and transparency. This is an admirable achievement for a 20 year old vision by the Founders as to the critical relevance of a safe and non-proliferative energy policy for today and into the future. (www.ltbridge.com)

Joel B. Grae has a long history of working with and sponsoring medical and scientific research projects at leading universities such as Yale, Cornell, Rutgers, Rensselear and Clemson. He has been issued five U.S. patents that have been assigned to Milli-second Technologies Corp, an international pasteurization company that extends the shelf life of liquid foods, in which he currently serves as a Director. Other current projects that he founded are a Concept II, LLC (Ovatech, LLC ) a non-hormonal contraceptive platform technology for women, Megathene LLC, an Ultra High Molecular Weight Polyethylene (UHMW-PE) platform technology, and Aviex Technologies LLC, an infectious disease vaccine platform technology.

Throughout his career Grae has integrated his knowledge of law, medicine and science with the formation of numerous entrepreneurial enterprises always with the goal of bringing them to commercialization. He continues an active interest in projects that promote the public good. He is an avid art and fossil collector and benefactor to numerous cultural venues, including the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies and the 2007 archaeological dig at Har Karkom, Israel led by Professor Richard Freund Ph.D. He recently donated an African antiquity collection to Yale University, and actively participates in many art exhibitions and panels on Collecting. (www.JoelBGraeEnterprises.com)