

Pittsburg loses 'optimistic' leader

By Ron Womble

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"He was a leader by his words and by his actions," said Tom Bryant, former Pittsburg State University president of Ken Brock. "You can look almost anywhere in this town and see his hand."

Ken Brock, Pittsburg businessman and entrepreneur, died at his home on Sunday, Dec. 31. He was 77.

Brock, who with his wife, Debbie, founded Names and Numbers, an independent telephone directory company in 1974, leaves a legacy that will not be easily matched, local leaders said Monday. As much as he was respected for his business acumen, it was his optimism, his community spirit, his willingness to help others that many said they will remember most about Ken Brock.

"He was the most optimistic person I've ever met," said Steve Sloan, president and CEO of Midwest Minerals said Monday. "He had a can-do attitude and 'no' was not part of his vocabulary."

Blake Benson, president of the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce, said Brock was both friend and mentor to him and many others.

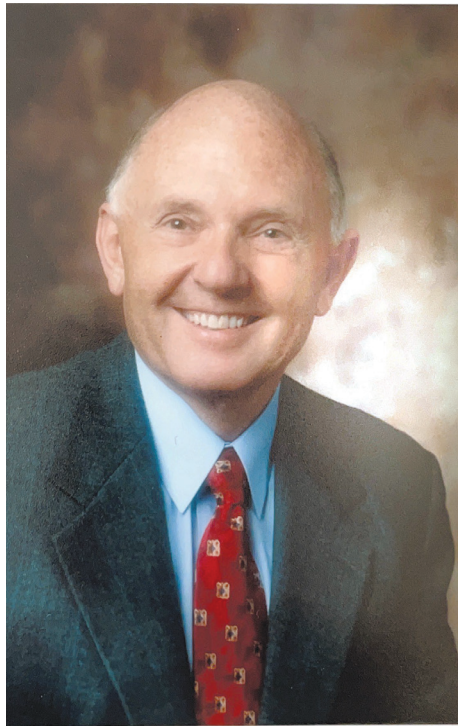
"I really wouldn't be here if it weren't for Ken Brock," Benson recalled, noting that it was Brock who flew to Arkansas to bring him to Pittsburg for an interview. "I learned more from just watching him than you can know."

Past PSU President Steve Scott said Brock inspired the people around him.

"His spirit and optimism were contagious," Scott recalled. "Over the years, I enjoyed visiting with Ken about leadership and public speaking. He was a student of both, and shared insights with me that made me a better leader."

In a conversation with Pittsburg City Manager Daron Hall in 2022, Brock shared some of his core philosophy.

"I've advocated for a number of years, what I call the three P's," Brock said. "The first one is a positive attitude. A positive attitude is a skill. It isn't natural for most people to be positive. So you have to learn how to approach projects with a positive attitude and look for possibilities. It's



an important part of being a business leader. The second P is prayer. You have to be humble enough to pray and know that there's a higher power, that you're not the power of the project. Number three is perseverance. To hang in there and keep going; don't give up."

It's likely that Brock needed all three of those P's for one of his signature projects, the expansion of U.S. 69 from two lanes to four. Brock, along with the late Dr. James AuBuchon, and others worked tirelessly for decades on the project.

He recalled a critical juncture in the work, when it appeared that the project might get derailed.

"The whole idea that Dr. AuBuchon and I worked together on was to get a four-lane highway from Kansas City to I-44," Brock recalled. "That will give us the hook we need for bringing business to this area. There were 23 Kansas highway projects under development that were scheduled to be built but they were all canceled when budgets fell apart. A team of us here in Pittsburg went to Topeka and met with the governor (Sam Brownback) and said, 'this is too important to us to be canceled. What can we do to get our piece back on the table?' So, at the time, we were the only city that came

back and said having our project canceled is not acceptable."

Their advocacy kept the expansion alive and today it is complete to Pittsburg and hopes are still alive for the completion to I-44 to the south.

A lifelong southeast Kansas native, Brock grew up in the rural community of Hiattville, southwest of Fort Scott.

"I would ride my bike to school," Brock said. "My dog always went with me to school. He would be waiting for me when school got out. I had a horse that I rode about every evening. So that was our routine."

It was there, that the seed was planted for the business Brock would eventually develop in Pittsburg.

"My parents owned a telephone company," Brock said. "They built the telephone lines and provided telephone service for the community. Then at one point, there became enough subscribers that they needed a telephone book. So, dad created a telephone directory and started doing that for other people. He ended up creating a pretty nice business, making telephone books for other companies. I did all the sales for him and kind of learned how to sell, working for him."

Names and Numbers began in Ken and Debbie's living room on Langdon Lane.

"I cleaned the furniture out of the living room and set up an office and that's where I operated for the next two or three years," Brock recalled.

Steve Sloan noted that Ken and Debbie Brock always worked together.

"Ken and Debbie operated as a team," Sloan said. "They were consummate companions."

Arrangements are under the direction of the Bedene Funeral Home in Arma. Funeral services will be at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Jan. 6, at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts at Pittsburg State University with David Duncan officiating. Burial will be at the Pittsburg Garden of Memories Cemetery. Friends may call from 11 a.m. until 6 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 5, at the Bedene Funeral Home in Arma. Memorials may be made to Christ in Youth Christian Outreach to Students.

Look for additional information in upcoming issues of the Morning Sun.