

# Man with \$50M idea mourned - Newton, Massachusetts - Newton TAB

On a night in early June 2001, Newton philanthropist Harvey "Chet" Krentzman stood on the stage of Symphony Hall. In the management consultant's hand was not his usual telephone receiver, or a pen, but a conductor's baton. The Boston Pops Orchestra, a group of musicians he dearly loved, sat expectantly before him. And then he proceeded to conduct the Pops in their famed rendition of Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

Krentzman, who died at 79 last week, was no musician, yet no one more richly deserved that ceremonial Pops-conducting honor. As the founder of the twin institutions "Presidents at Pops" and "Company Christmas at Pops," Krentzman helped raise \$50 million for the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the past 24 years.

"Chet's personality and devotion to the BSO was tantamount to the statues that adorn the interior of the hall - larger-than-life legendary figures that appear to be constantly surveying the hall," BSO Managing Director Mark Volpe wrote this week in a remembrance.

"A phone call or visit from Chet meant he had a fund-raising idea, a programming idea, a strategy for an improvement, a recommendation. He was constantly surveying every complex facet of the BSO organization with an offer of his help."

A string quartet of BSO musicians played at Krentzman's funeral service yesterday at his funeral at Congregation Mishkan Tefila.

Enthusiasm, encouragement and friendliness were at the center of Krentzman's hugely upbeat approach to both business and life.

"Chet was a life force. When he took you under his wing, he made you family. He was irrepressible, and eternally optimistic, and he made you feel as if you wanted to be that way too," said friend Marjorie Arons-Barron, of the public relations firm Barron Associates Worldwide.

An inclusive spirit touched nearly all his accomplishments. Though Jewish, he felt no awkwardness founding Company Christmas at Pops. And he met twice with the late Pope John Paul II. "He actually got the pope to make a donation to the state of Israel," said Arons-Barron.

Born in Chelsea in 1926, Krentzman received a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Northeastern University in 1949, and earned a master's degree and an MBA from Harvard. (A Northeastern faculty member, trustee and benefactor, the university honored him with an outdoor campus space named the Krentzman Quadrangle.)

It was in 1955 that he started the company that would define his business life: Advanced Management Associates. As a consultant, Krentzman advised and guided underperforming companies, often transforming their fortunes. He claimed to turn most companies profitable within one month.

As a consultant-entrepreneur, Krentzman often took stock interest in the companies he helped, and sometimes even took them over. A Dow Jones/Reuters article in 1998 details Krentzman's involvement with Frequency Sources Inc. a company with just \$500,000 in sales in 1968. Krentzman received a 50,000-share option as payment, and helped the company go public. By 1980, the company's sales were up to \$40 million. Krentzman's shares eventually rose to more than \$5 million in value.

The key to consultant effectiveness, he once said, was not so much the level of interest as the element of control: "As long as the consultant can be fired, they don't have control."

He believed that to be successful, a business owner need not be all knowing, but instead be fully aware of one's shortcomings: "If you know what you don't know, and act properly, then you can't lose."

Krentzman worked with his sons, Mark and Scott, in AMA until the time of his death. Amazingly, no matter how large his business grew, he always worked out of his Chestnut Hill home, and never employed a secretary.

Krentzman's philanthropic life held a breadth that gave evidence of his curiosity and enthusiasm. He was a trustee of Beth Israel/Deaconess Medical Center and a past president of Congregation Mishkan Tefila; he played a key role at the U.S.S. Constitution, the Norman Rockwell Museum, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and the American College in Greece.

Yet it was his role as a lifetime trustee of the BSO that may define his philanthropy, and his life-affirming optimism. Presidents at Pops was a straight-forward yet ingenious idea: Attract the presidents of small companies to join the world of the Pops by getting them to purchase 20 benefit tickets apiece for their friends and associates, and then arrange a program that makes them a real part of the proceedings.

"It was one of the greatest fund-raising ideas ever, getting these executives involved on an intimate level," said Dana Bisbee, society writer for the Boston Herald. "It was sheer genius, and never done before."

Bisbee felt that Krentzman came across as noncorporate. "He was very down to earth, laid back, sincerely friendly and warm. And he was a tremendous music fan," he said.

Krentzman said conducting the Pops was one of his great life achievements. "It was a ceremonial thank-you gesture," said Bisbee.

"The Pops can play 'Stars and Stripes Forever' with their eyes closed; they don't need a conductor."

It may have been one of the only times when Krentzman's input was not truly needed. His ability to help, as advice, aid or inspiration, was near legendary. "In business, philanthropy and life, one rule applies: if you can dream it, you can do it," he said.

Chet Krentzman leaves his wife of 53 years, Farla Blumer, sons Scott Krentzman of Newton and Mark Krentzman of New York City, a sister Dolly Tushman of Medford, and seven grandchildren.

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