



*R. A. P.*

# ROBERT A. PRITZKER

1926–2011

Elected in 1991

*“For innovative use of industrial engineering and management principles in the growth and development of diversified product-based manufacturing operations.”*

BY ROBERT M. NEREM

**R**OBERT ALAN PRITZKER, an industrial engineer, industry leader, and philanthropist, died on October 27, 2011, in Chicago, the city where he lived most of his life, at the age of 85.

Bob, as he generally was called, was born on June 30, 1926, in Chicago. He was the grandson of Nicholas J. Pritzker, who came from the Ukraine to Chicago in 1891 at age 10. Nicholas Pritzker worked in menial jobs, taught himself English, and eventually earned a law degree. He married and had three sons who all joined him at the firm Pritzker & Pritzker. One of his sons was Bob’s father, known as A.N. Bob’s brothers, like his father and uncles, also became lawyers. Thus, Bob was to become the first engineer in a family of lawyers.

In his youth Bob played the drums in a jazz combo called Swing and Jive with the Foul Five. Bob says that “the band was every bit as good as its name,” and this may quite possibly explain “why none of its members went on to a career in music.” Bob did, however, go on to a career in engineering, graduating in 1946 at the age of 19 from the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) with a degree in industrial engineering. This was after a short stint at Caltech. He also attended the University of Illinois and the Case Institute of Technology, but it was IIT that held his loyalty for his entire life.

Early in his career, Bob Pritzker held various positions in the manufacturing industry. In 1953, at age 26, he bought the Colson Company with his older brother Jay (a lawyer and businessman). This led to the acquisition of other manufacturing companies, and in 1964 these were joined as members of the Marmon Group. Under Bob's leadership as president and CEO, the Marmon Group grew from \$3.5 million in revenues to \$6.5 billion at the turn of this century, and at that time was the 19th largest private company in the United States. In 2002, as the head of the Group, Bob acquired several caster, hardware, and medical device companies. With these, he created Colson Associates, Inc. and, at age 76, took on the challenge of building this group of companies.

Bob Pritzker's success was due to his principles on how you do business and his creative and astute business judgment. His management style was based on the belief that his managers should be trusted to run the business with which they have been entrusted, a philosophy that decentralized decision making, thereby empowering the managers and granting them the authority to achieve the goals of their unit.

Bob was a professional lecturer on business management at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business. He was coeditor of a book published in 1960, *Modern Approaches to Production Planning and Control*, and his philosophy was captured in his 2006 book *Thoughts on Management*. The foreword of this book was written by Bob Galvin, an NAE member, a good friend of Bob's, and an individual who also passed away in 2011. In the foreword, Bob Galvin, describing Bob Pritzker, stated that "he wanted to make things—not just money," that he "acquired companies as an enlightened investor and steward," and that "best of all, he brought most of these companies' leaders into his family of companies." Bob Galvin went on to say that he served his companies and customers "faithfully and with uncompromising business integrity."

Bob Pritzker was a philanthropist over his lifetime and extremely generous. There is no greater evidence of this than his

dedication to IIT. As chair of the IIT board of trustees for many years, Bob presided over the reinvigoration of the institution. This involved his personal leadership, his management advice, and his extraordinary philanthropic support. Evidence of this financial support is the gift of \$60 million to IIT in 1996. He was also involved in the creation of IIT's Camras Scholars Program and Pritzker Institute of Biomedical Science and Engineering, which became the focus of the institution's research and education programs in biomedical engineering. Because of his many contributions, IIT bestowed on Bob an honorary doctor of humane letters and science degree in 1984. This was followed in 2002 with his induction into the university's Hall of Fame.

Bob served in many other ways as well, including through his involvement in the National Association of Manufacturers, which at one time he chaired. He also was very dedicated to the city of Chicago, and served on many civic and cultural boards there. He was a life trustee of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, an honorary director of the Lincoln Park Zoological Society, and chaired the board of trustees of the Field Museum of National History. He was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1991 and over the years served on a number of NAE committees. In 1999, he was elected to the NAE Council, serving two terms. He also was a member of the National Academies' Presidents' Circle up to the time of his death.

Bob Pritzker was a modest person, but a giant in the area of manufacturing. In a *Forbes* interview in 1988, he was described as a person who could be characterized as one of "pleasant rationality." He told *Forbes* that how things were made fascinated him—"the idea that materials and people came in two doors and something of value went out the third."

Bob is survived by his wife Mayari, five children: James, Linda, Karen, Matthew, and Liesel; 10 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. As his friend Bob Galvin said, "he was one of those rare self-made men, a leader of leaders," someone who will be very much missed, not only by his family but by all who were fortunate enough to know him.