



WILLIAM L. FRIEND

1935–2021

Elected in 1993

“For leadership in the development of new technologies and their application in commercial facilities.”

BY BABATUNDE A. OGUNNAIKE

WILLIAM LOUIS FRIEND, retired executive vice president and director of Bechtel Group, Inc., died January 27, 2021, at age 85, from complications due to covid-19. He was a passionate and practical engineer who believed in the power of engineering to change the world for the better.

Born June 17, 1935, in Queens, New York, Bill went to Stuyvesant High School and then studied chemical engineering at Polytechnic University, graduating summa cum laude in 1956. He then attended the University of Delaware, where he received an MS degree in chemical engineering in 1958. In 2005 Polytechnic University conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Engineering, *Honoris Causa*.

Bill served in the US Air Force Reserve in 1959 and then went on to enjoy a distinguished career in a variety of positions in engineering and construction, both as a practicing engineer and as an executive. He began as a regional manager of international operations and process engineering for the Lummus Company in the late 1950s, with field assignments abroad in Germany, Holland, Mexico, and Spain, and stateside in San Francisco, New York, Houston, and Puerto Rico. In 1972 he went to work at J.F. Pritchard in Kansas City, Missouri, rising to become president and chief executive officer.

In 1977 he joined the Houston office of Bechtel, the global engineering, construction, and project management company. He was elected a partner of the privately held firm in 1981 and to the board of directors 2 years later. He retired as executive vice president of Bechtel Group in 1998. The company's chair and CEO Brendan Bechtel had this to say about Bill: "He believed our ability to manage large, complex undertakings could add real value when applied to the US government missions in defense, space, nuclear security, and environmental cleanup. He helped to create a new government services unit, Bechtel National, Inc., in 1986, and led the organization until 1992. Today, that business is one of our four core businesses, a tribute to Bill's vision and leadership."

Barbara Rusinko (NAE 2018), who worked with Bill for Bechtel at the US Department of Energy's Savannah River site, recalls, "Bill created a work environment that was focused on quality and continuous improvement; he empowered us to keep up with advances in the profession and in our own areas of expertise. The talent that we have today...is an enduring legacy of his leadership years."

Bill was passionate about diversifying the engineering workforce, and in this he was a visionary leader far ahead of much of corporate America. He served as Bechtel's representative to the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (NACME) and chaired its board of directors (1992–96). "Bill was a strong advocate for our work to build an engineering workforce that looks like America," said NACME CEO Michele Lezama. "He was especially focused on our *Math Is Power* campaign, one of our first outreach efforts to precollege students and their parents." LeeAnne Lang of Bechtel's Corporate Affairs added: "Bill was very excited about it, so you can bet that all the schools within a 100-mile radius of Bechtel's San Francisco office were well aware of *Math Is Power*."

Bill's commitment to education and engineering research motivated much of his volunteer work, earning him a well-deserved reputation as one of the most admired and most generous members of the community. When Stan Sandler (NAE

1996), then chair of the Chemical Engineering Department at the University of Delaware, decided to establish a departmental advisory council in 1982, he chose Bill to be one of the cochairs. “As a new department chair in 1982, I found Bill’s sincere interest in the department, his industrial insights, and his history of the department extremely valuable,” said Sandler.

In addition, Bill was a trustee of Polytechnic University, his undergraduate alma mater, and chaired the university board’s Committee on Trustees. He chaired the University of California President’s Council on the National Laboratories, Los Alamos, Lawrence Livermore, and Berkeley. And after his election to the National Academy of Engineering in 1993 he served as treasurer, member of the NAE Council, and member of the Governing Board of the National Research Council. He was also active in other National Academies programs, including the Board on Energy and Environmental Systems (2009–11), Committee on Setting Priorities for NSF-Sponsored Large Research Facility Projects (2003–04), and NAE Committee on the Diversity of the Engineering Workforce (1999–2005). He was a fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers.

As generous as Bill was with his time and talent, he was even more so with his treasure, supporting—frequently and generously—a remarkable number of initiatives at the institutions from which he obtained his degrees. On a personal note, in 2004, through a very generous gift to the University of Delaware (UD), Bill created the William L. Friend Endowed Chair in Chemical Engineering, which I hold. In 2018 Bill and his wife, Mary Kay, were named inaugural members of UD’s highest giving society, the Founders Society.

As Mary Kay noted, “Bill and I were very fortunate to have been introduced to each other in 1995 by long-time friends. We both felt, even at our first meeting, that this could be something special, and, indeed, it was. We had 26 wonderful years together, traveling frequently, sharing our beach house with dear family and friends, and simply enjoying time with each other. Bill was a truly good man—honest, generous, trustworthy, supportive, and loving—and while I will grieve for him, I will also be so very grateful for him and the life we had.”

Michael Mislock, a stepson, added: "Among the many lasting impacts Bill had on people's lives, one that stands out to me is his commitment to education. He backed up his beliefs through large donations to universities and the establishment of several scholarships for minorities and young people who could not otherwise afford to attend a university. He and my mother also established trust funds to pay for higher education for each of their 14 grandchildren. This generous gift is something my wife and I will always be thankful for and we will use it to emphasize the importance of education to our children, and help them remember their Grandpa Bill."

He supported sports teams wherever he lived, was an avid tennis player, and enjoyed lifelong friendships.

Bill is survived by his wife Mary Kathryn Friend; his sons and their wives and families: Walter and Kimberly Friend and John and Jennifer Friend, as well as Michael and Whitney Mislock, Steven and Kim Mislock, Timothy and Deenie Mislock; and 14 grandchildren and 1 great-grandson.

