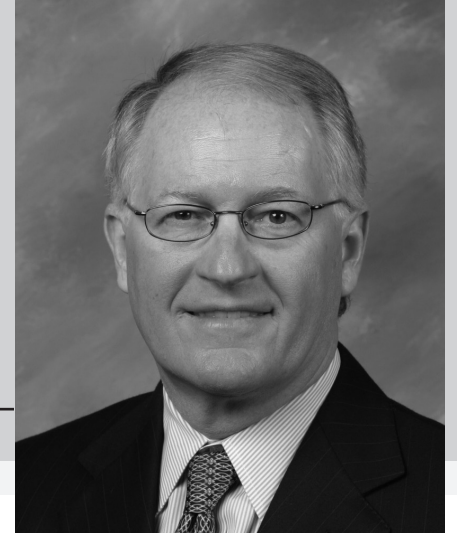




## DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

Peter J. Coccoziello '73 Bus



### To Peter J. Coccoziello for his distinguished career in real estate and his commitment to business and real estate education at Penn State.

Peter Coccoziello remembers attending class in the Forum Building on his first day at Penn State. “There were more kids in that Forum class than there were in my whole high school,” he recalled. “It was a rude awakening.”

The University opened Coccoziello’s eyes to the world outside tiny Fairchance, Pa., and the opportunities that would accompany a bachelor’s degree in finance. “For me, education was the paradigm shift of my life, and that centered around Penn State,” he said.

Today, Coccoziello is president and CEO of Advance Realty, a Bedminster, N.J., company that has acquired and developed more than 10 million square feet of commercial, residential, mixed-use, and industrial space since he founded it in 1979. He also advances Penn State opportunities in business and real estate education, giving back to the University that he says laid the foundation for his success.

Coccoziello serves on the Smeal College of Business Board of Visitors and co-chairs the Advisory Board for Smeal’s Institute of Real Estate Studies. With input from the two boards, in fall 2011 the college launched a new risk management major with a real estate option. Students can combine Smeal business classes in topics such as real estate finance and law with courses in areas like landscape architecture and construction management.

“We had all the attributes and disciplines within the University to create a real estate major that would be very supportive and that would be welcomed by a lot of companies,” Coccoziello said. “Ultimately, our goal is to have a hundred students in this curriculum, where people in our network can provide internships to these students so they would be truly sought after for employment.”

The entrepreneur recalled how his Penn State degree opened doors for him when he graduated during recessionary 1973. “They weren’t hiring on Wall Street,” he said. “There were many kids there looking for jobs. When people knew that you graduated from Penn State, they would grant you an interview. A Penn State education has value in the marketplace.”

Coccoziello went to work for a commercial bank and then for a consulting firm as a banking advisor for real estate investment trusts across the country. Tired of traveling hundreds of thousands of miles a year, he bought a vacant lot in West Orange, N.J., and constructed a 14,000-square-foot office building. That was the beginning of Advance Realty and its sister company, Advance Construction Corp.

In addition to his work on the boards of Smeal and the Institute for Real Estate, in 2004 Coccoziello and his wife, Sharon, established the Advance Realty Real Estate Lecture Series, which brings top-level real estate professionals to Penn State to discuss issues facing the field. “We wanted students to be able to learn about the industry and develop a possible passion for it, so they realize that real estate is much bigger and broader than a Century 21 sign on the lawn,” he said.

Coccoziello is president of the Advance Realty Foundation, which supports a variety of causes, including many that benefit young people. “One of my deepest interests has always been youth because I feel that I got a pass,” he said, referring to his opportunity to attend college and move past his economically disadvantaged background.

Among Coccoziello’s major honors are Developer of the Year, NAIOP—The Forum for Commercial Real Estate; Ernst & Young, Inc., New Jersey Entrepreneur of the Year—Real Estate Division; and Humanitarian Award, National Conference for Community and Justice. In 2007, he was named a Penn State Alumni Fellow and this past year received the NAIOP Legacy Award.

The Coccoziellos have three grown sons: Peter, a graduate of Cornell and Columbia universities, has joined the family business; Daniel, a Princeton University graduate, works for StructureTone, a New York City construction company; and Alexander, a Cornell University graduate, is an analyst for Merrill Lynch. Coccoziello is a life member of the Alumni Association.

