



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

Donald Devorris '56



To Donald Devorris for his lifelong devotion to Penn State and his highly successful and diverse business career.

He was just a young boy when Donald Devorris started visiting the University Park campus. His father graduated from Penn State in the mid-1930s and stayed active in his fraternity, so Devorris began spending time at University Park when he was just 7 years old.

"I was a Penn Stater from the beginning," said Devorris, who is chairman, founder, and chief architect of the Altoona, Pa.-based Blair Companies, a diversified organization encompassing dozens of businesses in the manufacturing, construction, automotive, coal, and real estate industries.

While in the engineering program at Penn State, Devorris spent his summers interning with the Jersey Central Power Light Company, giving him experience and contacts. Additionally, since the University had been such a great resource for large corporations, Devorris said, he was recruited by General Electric right out of Penn State. "I thought that was a great company," he said, "since they had

their own training programs for bringing someone out of college."

Devorris stayed a few years at General Electric before working for Emerson Gardner Electric, where he was a field engineer for the large electrical company. He helped build the Arthur Kill Generating Station in Staten Island, N.Y., collaborating with another electrical contractor and coordinating the work of more than 300 electricians.

Devorris said he learned patience, consistency, and understanding in his early jobs, traits that formulated the foundation for his business career and philosophy. Devorris' business ventures have grown exponentially, with Blair Companies employing more than 1,700 associates with annual revenue in excess of \$430 million.

With the businesses spread across a vast range of industries (automotive, real estate, etc.), Devorris said it's imperative to have the right people in place. He can't personally attend to every business need himself, but he has confidence in the people who lead and manage the individual corporations and entities.

"If you don't have strong leadership — people you have confidence in—at the helm of each business, you'll never be successful," Devorris said. "The rule of thumb I have is you're not going to be right every time in these diverse business investments. If I'm right seven out of 10 times, I'm feeling pretty good about it."

One particularly big decision Devorris made early in his post-Penn State life proved correct, and it catapulted him on his career trajectory.

Devorris' father owned half of a motor rebuilding company when he was transferred from Altoona, Pa., to Erie, Pa. Not wanting to still own half of the business, his father gave the investment to Donald, who moved back to Altoona and helped run the company. That business evolved into Blair Electrical Service Company; and during the next decade, Devorris helped grow Blair Electric into the largest electrical contracting company in the coal industry. The company continues to be in operation today, with Devorris still acting as owner.

Looking back on the decision about whether or not to return to Altoona and take his father's half-ownership, Devorris said, "I took the right fork—apparently."

Blair Companies, with the cooperation of local banks, have been able to keep certain businesses in the Altoona community viable by stepping in with financing when it was needed. "I've been happy to save jobs when opportunities came available, he," he said.

Devorris serves as director of Penn State Altoona's Advisory Board and as counselor of the University's Presidential Counselors. In 2010, he was honored with the Outstanding Alumni Award by Penn State Altoona.

He and his wife, Nancy, are life members of the Penn State Alumni Association and live in Altoona, Pa. They have two children, Philip and Andrea, and five grandchildren, Allison, Scott, Max, Claudia and Felicia.

