

Celebrating a *Life* Well Lived

Duane Pearsall, 1922–2010

Inventor and Advocate

After serving three years in the U.S. Navy during World War II, Duane Pearsall (BSBA, 1947) intended to begin the airport management program at Purdue University, but was disappointed to learn upon his arrival that the registrar's office had signed him up for the aeronautical engineering program (they thought his two years at the General Motors Institute before the war made him a great candidate). Frustrated, he and his wife, Marjorie (Marj), reviewed brochures they received and came across one from the College of Business Administration at the University of Denver. The couple headed to Denver. Marj, a graduate of the University of Iowa's School of Journalism, began working for the DU Chancellor's office. Duane earned a BSBA and a BS in engineering. That was the start of his astounding business career in Denver.

Today—more than 60 years later—the late Duane's granddaughters, Alison and Jillian Rowley, are following in their grandfather's footsteps, working toward their own BSBA degrees at his alma mater. Jillian says their grandfather's success always influenced

her, but first and foremost, Duane was a grandpa. "My memories of my grandfather are all about ice skating and building snowmen and him helping us with school projects," says Jillian, a senior international business major. "It wasn't until college that I realized all he did as a businessman. He was an impressive man."

Impressive may be an understatement. After graduating, Duane started his career as a sales engineer at Honeywell. He worked there for seven years before founding Pearsall Company, a manufacturer's representative for heating and air distribution equipment. In 1963, he founded Statitrol Corporation, and while working with static control, learned that ions absorb particles of combustion. The discovery led to the development of the first commercial ionization smoke detector by a U.S. manufacturer, followed by the first battery-powered home smoke detector (SmokeGard), the most significant advancement in fire safety of the century. The achievement earned Duane a slew of awards, including the Colorado and National Small Business Person of the Year Awards—the latter of which was presented to him by President Gerald Ford. In 1977, Duane sold Statitrol to Emerson Electric Company.

It didn't stop there. In 1983, the tireless Duane

cofounded Columbine Venture Funds, which invested nearly \$80 million in early-stage technology-based companies. On his retirement in 1993, the Rockies Venture Club, a nonprofit that connects innovative entrepreneurs with Colorado investors, established the Duane Pearsall Entrepreneurial Award to recognize outstanding achievement in Colorado's entrepreneurial community. The award was given to many notable Denverites, including John Elway, John Hickenlooper and Bill Daniels (posthumously in 2000).

Duane passed away on April 11, 2010, at the age of 88. As Alison—a sophomore international business major—puts it, it was clear that her grandfather touched the lives of many. “One man stood up at his memorial and said, ‘When speaking to him, you knew you were

“When speaking to him, you knew you were in the presence of greatness.’ That was the perfect description of my grandpa.”

—Alison Rowley

in the presence of greatness,” she says. “That was the perfect description of my grandpa.” His legacy, she admits, is a lot to live up to. “He did so much. It makes me nervous thinking about trying to fill his shoes, but it also makes me think that maybe I can change things, too.”

Duane changed the world through more than his business ventures. He also advocated for small business, which he felt was not properly represented in government. Between 1977 and 1988, Duane frequently testified before Congress in support of revising legislation for small businesses.

While he fought for change in Washington D.C., Duane appreciated the changes happening at the Daniels College of Business. “He was very pleased with the great improvements over the years,” says Marj, adding that her husband was a frequent guest lecturer at Daniels in the 1990s.

“The College has come up a great deal in the business school world, and that made him so happy.” Duane returned to Daniels in 2007, for a 60-year reunion—just as Jillian was finishing her freshman year.

As Jillian completes her final year at Daniels, it seems that the things she loves about the College are the very

traits exemplified by her grandfather. “I’ve had such a great experience at Daniels because the professors are all really smart, impressive businesspeople who happen to teach,” she says. “It’s not just about them. They feel it is important to pass on their knowledge.”

Duane Pearsall was certainly a man just as generous with his own wisdom and time. •

Photo:
Duane Pearsall
shaking hands
with President
Gerald Ford
(1976)

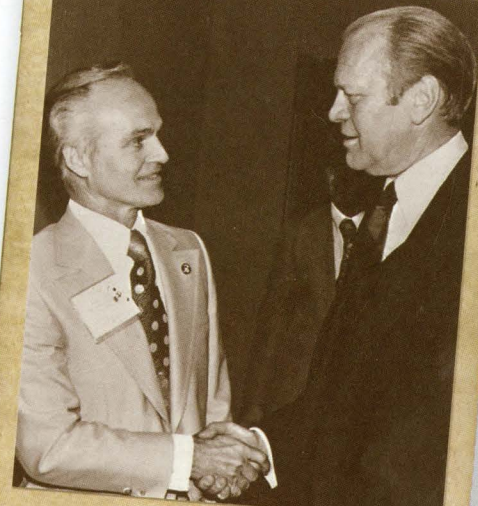


Photo:
Duane Pearsall's
granddaughters,
Alison and Jillian
Rowley



Photo: Duane
Pearsall with
his wife, Marj,
at his 60-year
DU reunion

