

“A Visionary and a Humanitarian:
Celebrating the Life of Bill Cook”

Celebration of the Life and Legacy of William A. Cook

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1. INTRODUCTION

The story of Bill Cook—his extraordinary entrepreneurial spirit, his deep commitment to his community, his strong dedication to his family—has become a legendary part of this state’s history.

I am sure that everyone in this auditorium knows at least part of that story. Tonight we are going to hear from some people who will pay tribute to Bill and his remarkable story.

2. A FOUNDATION OF GENEROSITY

I would like to start by paying special tribute to his long and incredibly generous support for and involvement with Indiana University.

As many of you know, Bill’s initial connection to Indiana University was through his beloved wife Gayle, who graduated from IU in 1956.

Beginning in 1963, she and Bill began to build on that connection. Soon after forming their corporation on July 5th of that year, and working out of their Bart Villa apartment on Second Street, the Cooks partnered with researchers at the IU School of Medicine to develop better, more effective life-saving products.

This led to decades of extensive support—support that continues to this day—by Cook biomedical companies for research projects in the IU School of Medicine.

Of course, this is in addition to the Cooks' generosity to many other units within the university. Over the course of nearly a half-century, their vision and support have expanded opportunities well beyond the School of Medicine to the Jacobs School of Music, the School of Education, the Wells Scholars Program, and IU Athletics.

Just last spring, I had the privilege of presiding over the dedication of Cook Hall Basketball Practice Facility, a jewel in our athletics complex. It is testimony to the Cooks' generosity of spirit that they insisted that the name of every Cook employee be included in the very large plaque that is featured in the building's lobby near the elevators.

With that spirit, the Cooks have joined the ranks of only a few families in the history of IU—families such as the Lillys, Krannerts, and the Simons—who have left an indelible mark on Indiana University with their great vision and generosity, and for that we are deeply and profoundly grateful.

3. LEADING IN AN ERA OF CHANGE

Of course, everyone here knows about Bill's tremendous business success. He was exceptionally good at transforming ideas into lifesaving products quickly, efficiently, and profitably without protracted discussion or unnecessary reflection.

Bill knew that he was entering a different culture when he became an IU trustee in 1995. But he wanted to offer his service to the university, and so he endured, with only occasional complaint, the slower and more ponderous culture of public entities.

We are grateful for the years he committed to serving in this capacity

This was a period of major change for the university.

During Bill's three years of service, Indiana University and Methodist Hospital formed Clarian Health Partners, renamed Indiana University Health earlier this year. As a member of the IU Trustee's Hospital Committee, Bill played a significant role in decisions surrounding this great milestone that has since touched hundreds of thousands of Hoosier lives.

During those years, the university established its first official intellectual property policy, and Bill was instrumental in that process as well, balancing the needs of the university with the concerns of faculty creators. This policy was fundamental to the establishment, soon after, of what eventually became the IU Research and Technology Corporation.

Officially speaking, Bill was part of the ad hoc committee that crafted that policy, but as Distinguished Professor Fred Cate, who helped lead this effort, explains, "It is hard to picture Bill as a member of any committee, even though he technically was. He was his usual plain-spoken, direct, let's-get-it-done-without-wasting-any-more-time self."¹

And during those years, I am pleased to say, IU established the first Vice President for Information Technology position to which President Brand appointed me in 1996. Bill was a strong supporter of the establishment of this position. In fact, one of the first people President Brand told me to talk to about IT at IU was Bill Cook, and this was the first time I ever met him.

¹ Electronic Correspondence with Wood. 27 May 2011. Used with permission.

Bill was among the earliest trustees to recognize the vital importance of improving IT to higher education. Drawing on his extensive experience with business systems, he had a visceral understanding of the future of IT and the economies of scale derived from a university-wide strategy that would make movement towards that future more effective and efficient.

During his tenure as a trustee, Bill returned again and again to the quality of education at Indiana University. It may not be widely known that Bill was a champion of a liberal education, called liberal because it is both wide-ranging and selectively deep, and it demonstrates the interconnectedness of all knowledge.

He saw liberal education as one of the fundamental strengths of the American system of higher education, as does much of the rest of the world, ironically at a time when some in this country are retreating from it in favor of narrow specialization. His decades of experience in the business world demonstrated to him again and again liberal education as a source of creativity, of flexibility, and of adaptability.

In his service as a trustee, though, Bill did not limit himself to such large-scale, highly visible issues. He expressed his concerns about the need for scholarships for student athletes, campus childcare, and community representation on IU's Land Use Policy Taskforce. He returned again and again to the welfare of individuals and of the community.

Even in his last meeting as a trustee, he was focused on making Indiana University a better and safer place, noting that new construction on the north side of campus would create traffic congestion. According to board minutes, "He urged the board in the future to examine with the University a master plan on how to get ... traffic ... moving. He stressed that he made his comments not only as a citizen of Bloomington, but also for

every person working at IU, be they faculty or staff. It's up to us, he said, to try to alleviate that problem in some way."²

4. CONCLUSION: A VISIONARY AND A HUMANITARIAN

This is the Bill Cook that I will always remember.

In one breath, he is talking about the university developing a master plan, an effort that would begin years after his suggestion. In the next, he is expressing his concern for the safety and welfare of others.

One day, he is running one of this country's largest private companies, and the next he and Gayle are hosting my wife Laurie and me at their historic Cedar Farm on the Ohio River. They had restored this property, and with its magnificent architecture and beautiful columned porch overlooking the river, it offers amazing testimony to their commitment to historic preservation.

This visit made it a special pleasure to host Bill and Gayle at Indiana University's historic Lilly House last December, one of the last times we would see Bill.

One day, he is receiving the Pioneer Award from the Pediatric and Adult Interventional Cardiac Symposium, that organization's most prestigious award, and the next he is attending my naturalization ceremony when I became an American citizen.

Bill Cook was both a visionary and a humanitarian, with one eye on the past and the other on the future.

² Indiana University Board of Trustees Minutes. 15 June 1998. Indiana University Website. <<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/iubot/welcome.do>>

On behalf of Indiana University, let me say how deeply grateful we are for Bill's extraordinary commitment, his profound generosity, and his tireless service.

On behalf of my wife Laurie and myself, let me say what a privilege it was to know Bill, to receive his wise counsel, and to call him and Gayle our friends.

I know Gayle, Carl, Marcy, and Eleanor miss him profoundly, but they have the solace of knowing that as well as being a loving husband, father, and grandfather, he was, as was said of Frank Lloyd Wright, "an American genius."

Thank you very much.