

Dr. Henry A. & Barbara M. Jordan Award

significant, longstanding, comprehensive philanthropic achievements



W. THOMAS MUSSER

"Always be thankful; never be satisfied."

How and why does one fit community service into their life, balancing their responsibilities to family and friends, while transforming a two-man enterprise into a leading-edge company serving the likes of DuPont, Barclay Card US, QVC, and Exelon? **Tom Musser's life story illuminates the way.**

Wilmor Thomas Musser was born in West Chester in 1934. From the beginning he was dubbed Tom. The oldest of three boys (Tom, Dick and Harry), he grew up in Pocopson Township.

The day after Pearl Harbor was bombed, his father Wilmor G. Musser enlisted in the Navy and spent the next four years serving his country in the Pacific. While Tom's father was away, Tom went to live with extended family who ran a small boutique hotel in St.

Petersburg, Florida. This gave young Tom his **first taste of entrepreneurialism.**

After Tom's father was discharged in 1945, he moved back with his family in Chester County and settled in Wawaset. Tom attended Unionville High School. He worked odd jobs for local farmers and helped tend the lawn and gardens of a neighbor's estate. Upon his 1952 high school graduation, Tom started his first "real" job at Lukens Steel in Coatesville. Some days Tom would stay at the plant beyond his shift just to see what would happen next in the steel making process.

Tom quickly found that while **he loved big industrial plants, he wanted more flexibility** with his workday schedule. He moved on to work with several electrical contractors. As business slowed down in 1956, Tom decided to visit his aunt in Florida. On a whim he took a detour to explore the University of Florida campus.

He ended up walking into the Dean of Admissions office, telling them that he wanted to enroll. A few weeks after this spur of the moment visit, Tom was accepted into college.

Tom financed his own college education. By his third year of school, he ran out of money. Since it was 1959, he knew he was a prime Army draftee for the Korean War. **Tom took the bull by the horns.** He followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Navy, serving as air traffic controller on the USS Shangri-La carrier operating in the Atlantic Fleet.

After serving the Navy for three years, rather than return to college Tom opted to work for an electrical contractor in Kennett Square. Over a few years, Tom became an Electrical Estimator & Project Manager. He **noticed that there was a niche not being addressed: industrial electrical contracting.** Most of the region's electrical contractors were residential contractors; they didn't really specialize in industry.

In 1964, Tom had an event-filled few days:

On Friday night, he **quit his job with the electrical contractor.**

On Saturday morning, he **married Bonnie Anderson.**

On Monday morning, he **founded Tri-M with his brother Dick.**



Tri-M was almost an enterprise that didn't get off the ground. Tom and Dick Musser were so anxious to get started that on the first day they forgot to tie their ladder down to their truck. When they got to their first job site, the ladder was missing. A farmer saw the ladder come off the truck, picked it up and returned it to the brothers. "Good fortune smiled on Tri-M that day, as it has ever since," the company wrote in a brief history about its beginnings.

In 1972, Tom became the sole owner and incorporated the company. As the years passed **Tri-M grew** to include more than **Electrical Construction**, adding specialized teams included **Building Automation Systems, Security Network Services and High Voltage.**

In service to his industry, Tom held leadership positions with the Associated Builders and Contractors, including serving as National Chairman. He also served as Chairman of the Board of the National Federation of Independent Business, a 325,000-member association of small and independent business owners across the USA.

In service to his country, Tom served as Vice Chair of the U.S. Naval Institute Foundation Board of trustees and on the Department of Defense Advisory Board for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve.

Tom **testified several times before Congress** for business and construction issues, and he **met with U.S. President George W. Bush** on three different occasions, in reference to issues facing independent businesses.

As Chairman and Co-Founder of an ever-expanding business enterprise, Tom retained his **commitment to the local community.** As an active member of the **Southern Chester County Chamber of Commerce**, he rose to serve as a Board member, and Board President.

For decades, Tom served as an active Rotarian. In 1986 he became President of the Kennett Square Rotary Club (now Rotary at Longwood) and was recognized as a Paul Harris Fellow. **Rotary's motto, "Service Above Self,"** resonated deeply with Tom.

In 1996, Tom agreed to **Chair the Capital Fund Drive of the Kennett-Unionville YMCA**, successfully organizing and inspiring the team of volunteers to raise \$5.2 million. "I've never seen anything like it," marvels Aaron Martin. "It was a terrific experience to volunteer with Tom. His energy and his drive were inspiring, and his commitment for the community Y was whole-hearted."



By 1998, it was decided to **sell Tri-M to a public company**. However, it was not for long. In Tom's own words, "After a couple years, **I did not like how the customers nor the employees were being treated** so I decide to do something about it. **I bought Tri-M back.**" Tom asked Jim Horn, a good friend and former Tri-M employee, to join Tom as co-owner of the company and take the position of CEO. This put a leadership succession plan in place. Today there are three owner partners; Jim Horn, Chris Peirson and Ron Bauguess, Tom's son-in law. Tom's children, Traci Musser Bauguess and Thomas H. Musser, continue to work at Tri-M, which currently has over 400 employees, 5 office locations and hundreds of long-term customer relationships.

With Jim Horn at the helm of The Tri-M Group, Tom knew that the business was in good hands. Tom made a concerted decision to more extensively **share his business savvy from the for-profit arena with the non-profit arena**.

In 2007, with his previous capital fund drive success under his belt, Tom agreed to Co-Chair another drive. Alongside John A. Featherman, III, Esq., they raised over \$30 million for the **Chester County Hospital Capital Campaign**. "Tom was epic," enthuses John. "He made sure the volunteer fundraisers deeply understood the need, by making sure we toured stellar hospitals. Our dreams became reality as the funds were secured." With funds raised in the Capital Campaign, the hospital added a new wing; consolidated all cardiovascular services into a single location; added 48 state-of-the-art patient rooms; added additional operating and procedural rooms; and increased efficiencies in the Emergency Department.



A year after the Hospital's new wing was completed, the **Kennett Area YMCA** came calling again. It had been two decades, and expansion was needed. Tom once again chaired the Kennett Area YMCA Capital Campaign, this time raising \$3 million.

Not only did Tom personally give back to the community, he also felt that **Tri-M should contribute**. **Tri-M encourages employees to volunteer their time and expertise; donates in-kind services; and contributes funds.** Jim Horn is clear: "It's always been the right thing for Tri-M to do."

Tri-M has **donated electrical installations** to numerous nonprofits, including the Kennett Area YMCA, Kennett Area Senior Center, and Unionville Quarterback Club Fitness Room. Tri-M erected the Unionville High School Baseball Scoreboard and donated testing equipment to Stroud Water Research Center.

Each year Tri-M sponsors students at the **PA Free Enterprise Week**, a unique summer program that offers high school students a challenging opportunity to see what it is like to run their own business.

Tri-M contributes employee volunteer time and corporate donations to scores of regional causes, focusing on **civic engagement, community health, youth, fitness, education and the environment**. This includes, but is not limited to:

American Cancer Society – Relay for Life
Anson Nixon Park
Chester County Futures
Clinton County Economic Partnership
Downtown Lock Haven
The Garage Youth Center
Historic Kennett Square
KAU Little League
Kennett Area Community Services
Kennett Area Senior Center

Kennett Education Foundation
Kennett Fire Company
Kennett Lions Club
Kennett Run Charities
Kennett High School After-Prom
La Comunidad Hispana
The Land Conservancy of Southern
Chester County
Longwood Fire Company
Longwood Rotary Foundation

March of Dimes
The Mushroom Festival
Officer Phil Child Safety Program
PoMarLin Fire Company
Special Olympics
THON Penn State
Toys for Tots
Unionville Community Fair
Wayne Township Fire Company
YMCA



In April 2016, Tom was inducted into the **Chester County Business Hall of Fame** by the Chester County Economic Development Council, recognizing Tom's **outstanding endeavors and achievements in the business community**.

In June 2016, Tom learned that the Community Foundation had chosen him as the **2016 Jordan Award winner, in recognition of his longstanding commitment to community philanthropy**.

In July 2016, after a brave battle with brain cancer, Tom passed away at his home surrounded by family.

J.M. Herr echoes the sentiments of fellow Jordan Award committee members: "Tom was a trusted friend and mentor to many. An energetic, insightful entrepreneur who developed a small business idea into an enormously successful one, **Tom cared about his family, his employees, his friends, his church, and the community.**"

Jeffrey Wright summed it up in Tom's memorial guestbook: "Tom was truly a **pillar of the community he served**. A quiet spoken man who spoke loudly by way of his **loving and generous actions**... Those who have enjoyed a mentoring relationship under Tom's guidance received a gift that was **priceless**. I can't help but think Tom is now focused on ensuring that Heaven is properly wired."

Tom Musser's legacy will continue to live on in the hearts and minds of the people he touched, for generations to come.

Ron & Traci Bauguess, Tom & Bonnie Musser & Tom H. Musser at Tri-M's 50th Anniversary Celebration

Tom Musser had one simple philosophy that served him well his entire life:

*Always be sure
to help out the
community
where you live.*

~ Bonnie Musser

