
CHANGING LIVES ONE SCHOLARSHIP AT A TIME

The Story of Ernest C. Wentcher



Wentcher
FOUNDATION
25th ANNIVERSARY



Looking at Ernest Wentcher's life, it was inevitable that education would be the focus of his philanthropy. The son of a German-born, self-taught businessman who spoke five languages, and an Irish-born teacher, the product of an elite boarding school education, and a World War II Navy Intelligence officer, all paint the picture of a man steeped in learning.

Though a consummate salesman who reveled in friendships and relationship building, he often acknowledged that it was his education that equipped him with the skills and the confidence to succeed, and hard work that turned his early years into a record of achievement.

So, when Ernie realized that he could make an impact on the lives of young people by providing them with a college education, he moved quickly to form the Wentcher Educational Fund.

CHANGING LIVES ONE SCHOLARSHIP AT A TIME

The Story of Ernest C. Wentcher



FOREWORD

You may wonder what the motivation was for *“The Story of Ernest C. Wentcher”*. Why has a book been written about his life? What’s so special about this life insurance salesman? What’s the big deal about Ernie Wentcher? All valid questions.

Wentcher Scholars have been very curious about this stranger who chose to change their lives through his generosity. I’ve heard time and time again, “Who was he?” and “Why did he choose to invest in the education of so many people like me?” Wentcher Scholarship recipients aren’t used to receiving tens of thousands of dollars, especially from a total stranger.

Ernie recognized the power of education early in his own life through the examples of his parents; his Irish mother, a graduate of the University of Edinburgh who became an English teacher, and his German father, who spoke five languages. Ernie’s own education at St. George’s College in England, a Catholic boys’ boarding school, for high school and college at the University of Brussels taught him that investing in education provides life-changing returns.

Before many of us who knew Ernie are gone, we thought we needed to gather that information and provide the story of this man who has changed so many lives. We also wanted to try to capture what can be learned from the enormous impact one person has had and continues to have on so many lives.

With this year’s selection of the Wentcher Scholar Class of 2026, we have reached four major milestones: the selection of the 21st class of Wentcher Scholars, the awarding of the 1,000th Wentcher Scholarship, the funding of the 20 millionth dollar of Wentcher Scholarships and the 25th Anniversary of the incorporation of the Wentcher Foundation. The magnitude of Ernie’s generosity has become overwhelmingly clear. With the goal of running in perpetuity and the strong support of current and alumni scholars, a devoted Board of Directors, wonderful volunteers and an incredibly talented and dedicated staff, the impact of Ernie’s vision gains momentum each year.

Ernie didn't really expect to see his vision of providing scholarships have a major impact during his lifetime. He started his foundation in 1997 at age eighty-three and it began operations four years later. He had set the cornerstones for the selection of his Wentcher Scholars—financial need, academic merit and, most importantly, character. By the time he died in 2013, there were already 186 current and alumni Wentcher Scholars and each year the cohort of new Wentcher Scholars was growing. The path was set, the foundation established and the means to invest in the education of thousands of people were firmly in place. While Ernie was living comfortably at home at age ninety-nine, he experienced a heart attack on a Saturday night and was admitted to a nearby hospital. He woke up the next morning, ate a bowl of ice cream for breakfast and died peacefully, confident that his fundamental belief that education is life changing had transitioned from a personal conviction into a powerful scholarship providing organization.

Ernie's story and his example have resulted in inspiring one Wentcher Scholar after another to say, "I don't know if I can accomplish what Ernie did, but I'm sure going to try!"

Brian Fitzpatrick

President, Wentcher Foundation

2022

INTRODUCTION

Ernest C. Wentcher (“Ernie”) lived a long and colorful life. From his birth in Siberia in 1914 on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution to his distinguished service in military intelligence during World War II and a successful career in insurance in Chicago, he embraced both fate and opportunity.

Throughout his life, Ernie lived according to the values he felt were important: family, education and hard work. He was a devoted son and generous brother and uncle.

Above all, Ernie had a gift for getting to know people. Wherever he happened to be, he struck up conversations with strangers, asking them about their families, their work, and their aspirations—and he never shied away from giving advice. He was so certain of his ability to read a person’s character that he often made financial deals on a handshake.

As he grew older, Ernie gave a lot of thought to young people and how they were going to succeed in this world, especially if they didn’t have a college education. He was troubled by the obstacles young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in the Chicago area faced trying to pay for college. It was unfair, he thought, that students who worked hard in school, got good grades and held down jobs couldn’t go to college simply because their families didn’t have the money.

Over the years Ernie pondered the problem until a flash of insight hit him on an ordinary day in 1997. “It struck me, as I started to cross Dearborn Street downtown, that I wanted to do something for young people,” he told the *Chicago Tribune*. In that moment the idea for the Ernest C. Wentcher Educational Fund was born.

The Wentcher Scholarship was to be more than a four-year free ride to college, however. It would be a different kind of scholarship. “There is a return expected, and that return is successful college graduation and the obligation to do something with your life that benefits the community or others,” said the Wentcher Foundation’s Executive Director Brian Fitzpatrick. In addition,

selected students had to maintain at least a B average and deport themselves with integrity.

Twenty-five years later, Ernie's dream has grown to include four major milestones: the selection of the 21st class of Wentcher Scholars, the awarding of the 1000th Wentcher Scholarship, surpassing the \$20 million mark in scholarships awarded, and the 25th anniversary of the incorporation of the Wentcher Foundation. Ernie would be amazed!

CONTENTS

I	A Life of Learning and Adventure.	1
II	Siberia	5
III	A British Education	11
IV	Building an Insurance Business.	18
V	World War II Navy Lieutenant.	21
VI	Back to Business.	31
VII	Son, Brother and Advisor	37
VIII	Ernie and Bea.	41
IX	Lively Competitor	47
X	A Genial Host	50
XI	Ernie's Legacy: A Scholarship With A Difference . . .	52
XII	Wentcher Foundation By the Numbers	55
XIII	Expanded Support of Wentcher Scholars	64
XIV	Profiles of Wentcher Scholars	69

I

A LIFE OF LEARNING AND ADVENTURE

How was it that Ernie Wentcher, a genial, self-made businessman who never had children of his own, would devote all his financial resources to ensuring that deserving young people receive a college education?

Fortunately for Ernie, he was born to parents who set the stage for a life of continual learning and adventure. His father, Otto W. Wentcher, grew up in Germany, where his imagination was fired by stories about the American West. Otto collected books on American cowboys and Indians and dreamed of one day emigrating to the United States to live the life of a cowboy. In his early twenties, Otto left Berlin and set out to seek his fortune in England. He became an apprentice in the machinery trade while teaching himself English at night.

When Otto finally emigrated to America in 1900, he had already learned five languages. Instead of leading the adventurous life of a cowboy, he was hired at the age of twenty-one by International Harvester Company to sell agricultural machinery in Odessa, Russia, no doubt because of his fluency in languages. Later, he was named manager of the company's assembly plant in the Siberian city of Novo-Nikolaevsk, 2,000 miles east of Moscow. From there he traveled throughout Europe selling farm equipment for the company. Otto's dedication to work and to improving himself through learning was a powerful inspiration for his son.

Education had always been a theme in the life of Ernie's mother, Pauline Nunan Wentcher. One of six children who grew up in the small farming community of Mallow, County Cork, Ireland, Pauline, by nature spirited, was a pioneer among her siblings. It was her dream to have a career far away from rural Ireland. Her father, a prominent landowner, insisted she prepare herself to be

a homemaker; instead Pauline fled to Edinburgh, Scotland, to pursue a degree in teaching at the University of Edinburgh. This qualified her to teach English, history, geography, latin, algebra and geometry in the highly regarded Edinburgh school system.

Pauline immersed herself in the culture that a large city offered by attending the theater, art galleries and concerts. Always a voracious reader, she devoured the works of such classic authors as Dumas, George Elliot, the Bronte sisters, Victor Hugo, Dickens and Gibbons' "History of England." In addition, she entertained friends by reciting soliloquies from Shakespeare's plays.

While living the life of an independent young woman in Edinburgh, Pauline was diagnosed with tuberculosis, a disease affecting the lungs. Doctors recommended she go to a cold, dry climate to recuperate. Her options were Switzerland, Colorado or Russia. She chose to go to Odessa where through friends she met a tall, slender and fair-haired young man, Otto Wentcher, who had been sent to the Odessa office of International Harvester Company.

The couple married within a year during which time Otto was promoted to manager of the company's assembly plant in Novo-Nikolaevsk.

It was the eve of the Russian Revolution. By 1914, Europe was on the verge of chaos. Alliances that had been previously forged among the great powers were beginning to unravel over territorial disputes. The rise of nationalism within countries stirred dreams of empire building at whatever cost. European countries were in a race to build up armaments and accumulate weapons as a show of power. Great Britain increased its military budget from 625,000 pounds to 29 million pounds, while Russia more than tripled the size of its military.

National grievances and animosities, already festering, escalated in July of that year when Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, was assassinated by a Serbian student terrorist. Suddenly, Europe was in turmoil: Austria-Hungary attacked Serbia; Russia came to the aid of Serbia; France backed Russia due to existing treaties; Austria-Hungary's ally Germany declared war on France; and France's ally Great Britain declared war on Germany.

Meanwhile, the United States held firmly to a policy of nonintervention. In the words of President Woodrow Wilson, Americans "must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men's souls." For a time, life in America went on without distraction. Americans danced to Ragtime, enjoyed such newly introduced foods as pasta, canned tuna and peanut butter.



Crowd gathered in a field at Ekaterinburg (Ekaterinoslaw) to witness a demonstration of the first International Harvester tractor shipped to Russia. The tractor is pulling a breaking plow.



McCormick Harvesting Machine Company catalog titled "100 Harvest Scenes All Around the World."



International Harvester general office in Moscow, 1912

Photos courtesy of Navistar

Chicago had become the nation's second largest city. Construction started on Navy Pier and Wrigley Field. Ford Motor Company's Model T allowed Americans to travel longer distances. American businesses were booming and their influence stretching as far as Russia. Among the Chicago enterprises attracted to Russia was International Harvester Company, a manufacturer of farming machinery. It was to the Siberian capital of Novo-Nikolaevsk that International Harvester sent the German-born now U.S. citizen Otto Wentcher to represent its interests.

Though it was named after Czar Nikolas, Novo-Nikolaevsk was anything but an Imperial city, according to "Premonitions of Russian Industry: A Brief History of Novo-Nikolaevsk." The city was founded as a stop on the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway and quickly became a sophisticated commercial center in the middle of the country:

Novo-Nikolaevsk's grain mills produced an astounding thirty percent of the Russian Empire's processed grain by the end of the Imperial period. The city was paved in 1910, telephone wires came to it in 1906, and it received electric power in 1912. Industrialization allowed for an even more dramatic economic boom here than was seen in almost any other industrializing Russian city of the early twentieth century... (it) was nicknamed 'the American City' due to its rigorous grid planning... While this city happened to be founded as a Trans-Siberian railway stop, by the 1917 revolution its character was undoubtedly much more industrial.

—The Imperia Project/Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies,
Harvard University, 2019

II SIBERIA

“Compared to others we lived like kings in Russia.”

— *Ernie Wentcher*

Temperatures were near freezing on the late March day in 1914 on which Ernest Case Wentcher was born. The Wentcher family—Otto, Pauline, a daughter Celeste, and now Ernest—remained geographically removed from a world at the brink of war and lived in a comfortable log house in Novo-Nikolaevsk. The Wentchers lived on a large estate where Otto loved to horseback ride mornings and evenings. “One of the staff was in charge of the horses and would have to have one ready any time my father was in town,” Ernie recalled. Pauline was happiest sitting with a good book.

The family’s wooden home provided warmth, more so than a brick structure would in the Siberian climate. During the long winters, it was not uncommon for temperatures to drop to 20 degrees below zero. In the absence of deliveries, a cow assured the children would not go without fresh milk. Chickens, geese and a vegetable garden allowed Anuta, the family’s beloved cook, to prepare healthy meals for the family. In addition to a cook and the stable worker, a man would come to tend to the various fires which warmed the house.

Although Pauline and Otto spoke Russian, the family spoke English at home, and the children developed



Otto and Pauline



Ernie and Celeste

horses and cows would all sleep in the kitchen. One person was designated to keep adding wood to the stove – the only source of heat.

Otto Wentcher's sales territory stretched from London to the Mediterranean, which required him to travel extensively. He would often leave Pauline and their young children for long periods of time; thus, Pauline took over the children's early education by tutoring them at home.

Pauline's Irish accent. What Russian both Celeste and Ernest picked up as young children most likely was learned from their peasant housemaids. Four dogs completed the picture-perfect family: two Fox Terriers, Jack and Jill; a St. Bernard and a Russian guard dog. Still, it was so cold in the winter that everyone—family, workers and even



Ernie and Pauline



Ernie and Otto

Within a few years after the Wentchers' arrival in Novo-Nikolaevsk, discontent began to foment among industrial workers, rural peasants and the Bolsheviks, members of a far right and growing Socialist party. The Russian government's expansionism during World War I at the expense of its citizens caused food and fuel shortages and inhumane conditions for workers. By 1917, the Bolsheviks, as they were called, united in a violent overthrow of the government and the repressive regime of Czar Nicholas II.



Otto

The good life the Wentchers had become accustomed to began to crumble with the onset of the revolution. Thousands of miles away from Moscow, staples such as coffee, tea, meat and butter became scarce. Closer to home in Novo-Nikolaevsk was the threat of starving peasant soldiers, “desperate men who seized trains by any means necessary,



Otto on horseback



Otto in Siberia

rampaging looking for food and going so far as shooting the engine drivers. They traveled on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, wreaking havoc wherever they stopped, breaking into liquor stores, getting intoxicated and looting markets, moving on only once they took all there was to be taken,” Celeste Wentcher Chamberlain later recalled.

International Harvester had pulled its employees out of Europe, though Otto Wentcher was told he and his family would be fine. In her family history, Celeste describes the harrowing incident with Bolshevik revolutionaries that signaled it was time for the family to leave Siberia:

“One day, two or three Bolsheviks came to the factory and took my father to the gaol (jail) where they demanded he, representing a rotten capitalistic country, give them the company payroll or he would be shot...He was interviewed through the night but he stuck to his story that the money only came once a month, and he therefore didn’t have money there in the bank. He succeeded in convincing them that they were out of luck, so at about 6 a.m., they released him.”

Under normal circumstances, the train trip to Moscow would take a week. But now no one knew when, if ever, a train would come. Otto paid a village man to keep an ear out for the train. Once he heard it coming, the man was to race on horseback the three miles to the Wentcher home to alert the family. Pauline kept the children in their clothes so they could flee at a moment’s notice and make it to the station. That moment would take three weeks to arrive.

When the Wentchers reached the station, they were thrilled to see the large black train they were certain would carry them to freedom. Little could they anticipate the trouble they would encounter in the coming minutes. The legend of the Wentchers’ escape from Siberia pieced together from Celeste’s family history and conversations with those close to Ernie, goes something like this:

While the train stopped to be replenished with water and coal, passengers disembarked to stretch their legs and purchase something to eat or drink. Conductors would signal passengers to return to the train by ringing bells in three intervals.

When Otto presented the four train tickets to the conductor, he was told they were worthless as there was no room on the train. Otto attempted bribery and failed. Pauline went with a different approach, turning on her famous charm. She asked the conductor if she herself could check whether there was a compartment for her and her daughter.

There may well never be another train, she pleaded.

The conductor unlocked the door and let Pauline on board where she discovered at the end of the corridor a woman who appeared to be alone. Pauline explained her situation and offered to pay her for permission to share the compartment with her and her daughter; her husband and son would ride in a box car with the soldiers, she assured her.

The woman responded unsympathetically. "Madame, I have paid full fare for this compartment and I am not interested in your problems." As the conductor rang the second bell and told a teary Pauline she must get off the train, a man called to her. He overheard her exchange with the woman and offered space in his compartment. The kind man asked for only one thing, that Pauline would provide him with an English lesson each day of their journey. It was a deal.

Upon securing space on the train, Pauline had merely moments to act. The conductor was about to let her off when she shouted to Otto in English, "Quickly, throw Celeste to me—I have a place!" Otto threw his daughter onto the train as the door slammed shut behind her, leaving Otto, Ernie and others stranded on the platform.

As the third and final bell rang, Otto grabbed his son and the family's suitcase and raced alongside the train until he came upon the box cars. Soldiers—or were they angels— outstretched their arms. Otto tossed Ernie into their midst and clamored on board.

The Wentchers spent the next ten days on the Trans-Siberian train enroute to Vladivostok and a new life. In Vladivostok, the family boarded a ship to Tokyo, where they waited six weeks for an American steamer to bring them to Honolulu. From there, they transferred to a ship to San Francisco, California, and then to Chicago, home to International Harvester's headquarters.

The Wentchers were wise to get out of Novo-Nikolaevsk when they did. The city was ultimately ravaged by the Russian Civil War and renamed Novosibirsk ("New Siberia"). Later, Ernie would regale friends and family with stories about how his earliest memory was being tossed into the arms of soldiers as his family escaped Siberia and the Russian Revolution.



Ernie and Celeste in Japan

III

A BRITISH EDUCATION

"I had the good luck to go to school in England. We had a wonderful school system."
— Ernie Wentcher

In 1918, after escaping Russia, Otto Wentcher accepted a transfer to Wichita, Kansas, where he sold machinery primarily to farmers in Kansas and Oklahoma. In Wichita, they welcomed their third child, Natasha. Once settled in Wichita, Pauline became the subject of curiosity in her social circles, just as she had been in Novosibirsk where she was the only English-speaking woman. She was invited to give a talk to a group eager to hear about her experiences living on three continents, including how she got by at first in Russia with her knowledge of French and eventually learned to speak Russian with ease and was able to establish friendships. Her presentation was summarized in an item printed in a Wichita newspaper:



"Mrs. Wentcher is a woman who possesses a rare charm of personality. Every minute that she is speaking, her hearers are listening to things of worthwhile interest."



Ernie



*Sisters Celeste, left, and
Jean with Ernie*

Ernie inherited his father's passion for horses and cowboys, and the opportunity to explore the American West would be fully embraced. The Wentchers vacationed in Colorado where it was cooler and dry for Pauline. On these trips, Ernie pretended he was a cowboy.

"Early in the morning, he would get dressed and ride a horse from the front door of their cottage to the mailbox to get the morning paper for his dad," said his nephew John Halla. "If Ernie could have been anything at age seven, eight or nine, he would have been a cowboy."

When the war in Europe came to an end, International Harvester transferred Otto to Belgium, making Europe the third continent Ernie would call home. When the children reached school age, the Wentcher children were sent to boarding schools, presumably for the quality and vigor, which met Pauline's high standards when it came to education. By now the Wentcher family included another daughter, Jean, born in 1922.

"I had an ambitious mother, and she stressed education beyond everything else, in a very diplomatic way," Ernie affirmed. "She encouraged good grades; that's what I remember about her more than anything else."



Having been a schoolteacher in Scotland, a significant accomplishment for a woman in those days, Pauline determined the direction of her children's education. Celeste was enrolled at Notre Dame Convent, a nearby Catholic day school for girls in Brussels, and Ernie at a Christian Brothers preparatory school. On Thursday afternoons, Pauline took Celeste and a friend to places of interest such as the Botanical Gardens, a museum, or a walk in the King's public gardens in Brussels. Often, Ernie joined them. On rare occasions they would take in a vaudeville show.

Ernie was later sent to St. George's Preparatory School in Weybridge, England, an all-boys school 20 miles southwest of London in the county of Surrey. During his years there, St. George's was slowly recovering from the darkness and devastation of World War I. In its first post-war issue, the school newspaper, *The Georgian*, reflected on the sentiments of the student body:

"By the end of the war, 367 Old Georgians [as former pupils are called] saw (military) service, with fifty-seven making the supreme sacrifice for their country."

"Thank God, the end has come, and victory the most complete is in our hands."



St. George's College, Weybridge, UK

We approach our readers this evening—the first of many Christmases free from the horrors of world slaughter, with an intense feeling of gratitude and relief. Thank God, the war is won, and our present pupils, even those in their last year of school life will be free to carve out their careers in the honourable paths of peace.”

Leadership and Athletics

Ernie remained in Weybridge to attend St. George's College Advanced School (high school), where he was named “Best Boy,” the equivalent of school president and a major honor in English schools. He showed leadership qualities by serving as head of his house and captain of the rugby team as well as the second cricket team, remarkable achievements for an American young man thrust into a British Catholic school.

The independent-minded boy may have been less popular with his instructors. His annual report card dated midsummer 1931 includes some harsh remarks: “Efforts seem to be spasmodic” in geography; “Works when he feels like it” in science, and “I think he has ceased to try,” from his French teacher. The Prefect of Studies warned that Ernest should “give up his independent spirit”

in order to finish his schooling at St. George's.

Despite his unremarkable academic performance, the privilege of a high-quality education was not lost on Ernie. "After World War I, England recognized that education was a way to prosperity for all English boys and girls," he noted in 2013. Ernie joined in a national movement sweeping the country, advocating for scholarships to students who possessed talent and potential yet lacked the financial means for higher education. "If you gave a pound to a scholarship, you were doing something for the country. Educated children contribute to the general health of society," he said.

Ernie strongly believed that one's foundation in life is laid in the home, and the important role a mother plays often goes unacknowledged.

"In my book, [we] never gave credit enough to the mothers of these kids," he said. (Among the items he kept safe in his files for many decades was Pauline Norah Nunan's teacher's certificate from Scotland's Department of Education dated the first of August, 1906.)

After graduating from St. George's, Ernie enrolled in the University of Brussels (1931-1935) in Belgium where he received a baccalaureate degree with a major in chemistry. At Brussels, Ernie continued to demonstrate his facility for languages by passing and taking all his exams in French. Having inherited his father's love for sports, he kept active in athletics and captained the University of Brussels tennis team.

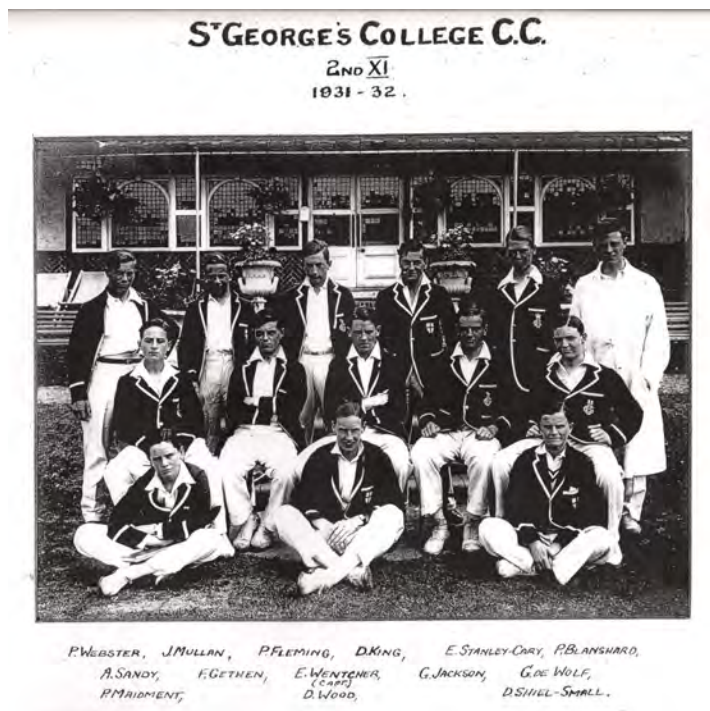
He graduated from the University of Brussels in 1935. His father arranged for him to work at an International Harvester assembly plant in Copenhagen, Denmark. His parents felt that working for the same company his father was associated with would provide more opportunities along the way.

But Ernie, known for

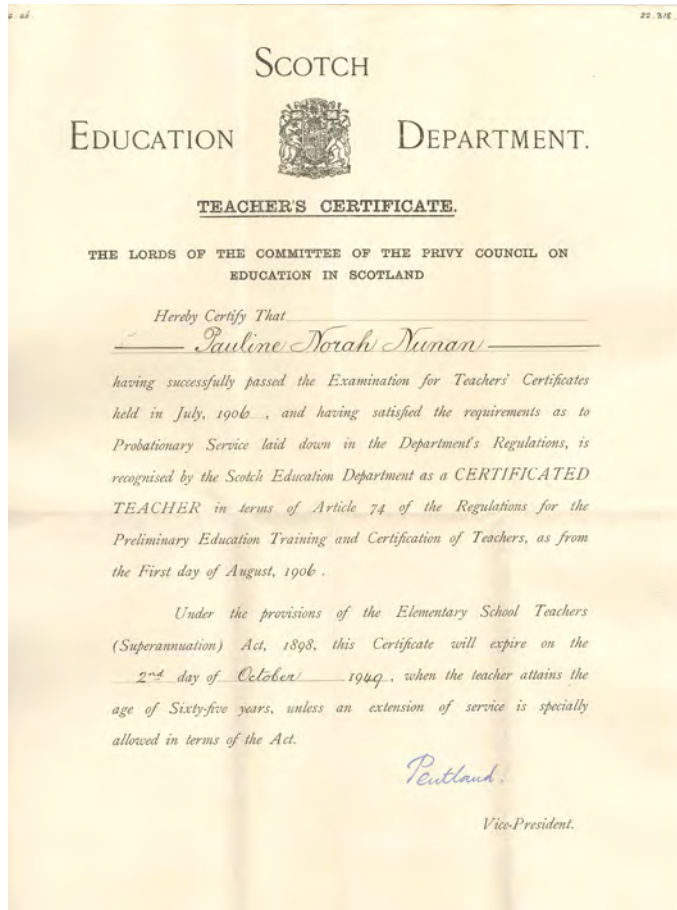


Ernie at St. George's

doing things his own way, had other plans. He lasted six months at International Harvester before deciding to return to the United States and start fresh in a new career. While he didn't stay long, he did pick up some of the Danish language. This would prove valuable in a few years.



Ernie in Brussels



Pauline's teaching certificate

IV

BUILDING AN INSURANCE BUSINESS

“It is my opinion that sometime in the near future he will be known as one of The Equitable’s finest salesmen.”

— Taft Woody, Assistant Agency Manager

In 1935, The Equitable Life Assurance Society hired Ernie as a salesman in its Chicago office. The Equitable primarily sold life insurance policies and later expanded to include commercial insurance.

Pauline and Otto Wentcher remained in Brussels, while Ernie and his sister Celeste shared an apartment in Chicago. Their father sent them each \$100 a month as they were starting out in their careers; Ernie in insurance and Celeste working as a dress designer. That winter, Ernie joined a rugby team, and Celeste remembered bitter cold Sunday mornings attending his games in suburban Winnetka.



At age twenty-one, good looking and smooth talking, Ernie possessed the prerequisites needed for being an effective salesman with the Warren Woody Agency, an affiliate of The Equitable.

Executives at The Equitable noticed the abilities of the junior salesman and showered him with praise in letters written to Otto Wentcher, who asked to be kept apprised of his son’s progress:

“Ernie would have a very difficult time getting started in the insurance business in Chicago as lack of contacts and the fact that he knew little of American methods of conducting business. This would tend to make it much harder for him than it would for an American boy of equal ability. Yet I have never in my experience with The Equitable seen such a young fellow who applied himself better to business and showed greater promise for the life insurance business.”

—Warren V. Woody, Agency Manager, 1936

“...splendid performance for a young fellow of Ernie’s age, considering the fact that he is a stranger in town and knew so little about American business... Ernie is a fine boy with marvelous habits and a remarkable understanding. He shows all of the signs of having had a great deal of special attention from a very intelligent family...It is my opinion that sometime in the near future he will be known as one of The Equitable’s finest salesmen.”

—Taft Woody, Assistant Agency Manager, 1937

Ernie threw himself into his work at the Warren Woody Agency. His ambitions were lofty, and he wasn’t always pleased about the business, writing his father, “It takes a long time to deliver.”

“I’m determined to have \$50,000 sold by the end of the year. That’s important. That will mean about \$370 for me which isn’t bad work. But I do want to see the color of some money,” he wrote in December 1938.

“A good sale would cure my financial ills. I’d like to start the year with a bang and some money,” he wrote his father in January of 1939.

By May 1939, it became apparent that war with Germany was imminent. After International Harvester Company evacuated all the employees in the Brussels office, Pauline and her younger daughters were sent back to Chicago. Otto Wentcher had been in Jerusalem for two weeks. Pauline was understandably fearful for her husband since she knew all too well the hazards of leaving a country when law and order have failed.

Celeste wrote in her letters to her granddaughter:

“Eventually, we learned that...four of the Harvester executives took one car and headed for a port in France. Immediately gas became nearly unobtainable, as the roads became clogged with people fleeing. Nevertheless, Daddy and his assistant, Bud Fisher, reached Nice, the others having decided...it was safer to go to Switzerland. Here they learned an Italian ship was to sail from Genoa the next day, and they could obtain passage. It was “the moment of truth” so Daddy told Bud Fisher he must decide for himself whether he wanted to take this chance to get home. The danger was, should the Italian government, siding with Germany, declare war before the ship reached New York harbor, it would return to Italy and all passengers would be [interred] as war hostages, not a pleasant prospect. Bud decided to stick with Otto Wentcher and by the grace of God they made it. No more ships sailed after that.”

The Wentcher clan gathered at Union Station in Chicago to welcome Otto with hugs and kisses and relief at seeing him safely back.

V

WORLD WAR II NAVY LIEUTENANT

"We prepared ship after ship to go off to the greatest show in the world."

—Ernie Wentcher

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, marking the start of World War II. In a letter, Otto Wentcher urged his only son to enlist before the military draft became law. Ernie followed his father's advice and began to wind up his affairs at the insurance



*Lieutenant J.G., Naval
Intelligence Service*

agency in Chicago. He handed control of his business matters to his dad. He had so much confidence in his father, he told him he couldn't think of a better man for the job. "At least if you don't run it well, you won't rob me."

The following year, 1940, the Germans captured Paris, and the United States significantly increased its naval forces. Ernie enlisted as a Lieutenant, J.G. (junior grade) in Naval Intelligence Service. He believed he attained this commission due to his knowledge of Europe and his gift for languages, which now included fluency in French and some German, Danish and Russian. In a letter to his customers, Ernie wrote, "Please regard with the highest esteem my father, Otto Wentcher, who has 50 years of experience in business matters...I am joining the U.S. Navy."

ERNIE CATCHES A GERMAN SPY

Before he was sent overseas to join the war effort, Ernie spent time assisting in U.S. Intelligence operations in Chicago. Because of his ability to speak German, he often attended political and social events to observe and report back where German Americans gathered. Outgoing as he was, Ernie struck up a conversation with an individual and the two agreed to have lunch. Ernie said he first wanted to drop off his briefcase at his office—U.S. Intelligence in Chicago was located in the Lyric Opera Building at the time. As they entered the building with its “United States Naval Intelligence” sign over the door, his acquaintance raised his arms. Ernie thought that was odd and told him it wasn’t necessary. Ernie proceeded to introduce him to his boss and after questioning, the individual surrendered and revealed he had arrived in the United States via a German U-boat off the coast of New Jersey. Although Ernie didn’t know for sure, he thought naval intelligence tried to flip the German spy and sent him to South America, where he became a double agent.

Ernie was assigned to the Navy Construction Battalion, commonly referred to as “Seabees,” a unit charged with building temporary and permanent structures to meet the Navy’s growing need for bases, camps and other permanent and temporary structures during World War II. Ernie was promoted to the rank of commanding officer with the reference: “Lieut. Wentcher understands people, fits into military life, is intelligent, a tremendous worker and a ‘tough’ officer.” His job was to oversee rebuilding of the port that had been badly damaged by German bombing.

In February 1944, Ernie wrote home to provide his family with his latest address and news of his new job as “executive officer at a big base:”

“My C.O. apparently requested me, and God knows why because I battled him when I was under him and he was tough but fair. Every one of my friends [is] rather amused at the turn of events...If I had ever worked as hard running my business, I would have made not \$20,000 per year, but \$50,000.”

“I am executive officer to a captain and have a good job. It all bespeaks recognition. We have some few thousand men in our command. Coming here last year I never dreamed I would end up with this job.”

“The war is moving fast. Comm. Flynn and I have been sent away on temp duty on a special mission. We’ve had a lot of fun, some excitement and have been in a city right behind the army while they were cleaning up the last of the enemy.”

“I am fine and still lucky. Looks like I’ve been lucky this far in life—hope it will continue. We helped play a small part in the invasion. Some of my closest friends here were ordered into the middle of it a few hours before D Day...small boat officers who have been thru two campaigns already. These boys, like all good soldiers, didn’t want another one unless ordered into it. Both have silver stars. We have been thru a lot over here working hard and accomplishing much. I had tears in my eyes when they left.”

“We prepared ship after ship to go off to the greatest show in the world,” he wrote his mother. “The soldiers on board cooped up, on edge. I felt sorry for them... It reminds one of waiting to die.”

GENERAL EISENHOWER: A HERO

During his military career, Ernie came in contact a number of times with Supreme Commander of Allied Expeditionary Forces and future president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Ernie thought the world of him.

“He had the common touch,” Ernie reminisced in 2013. “Eisenhower felt the way to get the best information was to go right to the troops. He [Eisenhower] took off his coat—his uniform jacket—and he literally put his arms behind his back, and he said, ‘Look, I don’t know anything—everything I get with any value is from you guys.’”



Commanding Officer



Landing craft infantry on way out for an 'exercise'



Port of Brest



*Dwight Eisenhower,
Supreme Commander
of the Allied
Expeditionary Force*



*"Twisted bridge structures blocked the Penfeld River channel.
The wharves, dry docks, cranes along the waterfront, even the
breakwaters enclosing the naval basin and the commercial port,
had been ruined. Scuttled ships lay in the harbor."*

“He’d ask a question or two of us and we’d tell him what we thought. Then he’d turn to his staff and ask, ‘Do we know anything about that?’ I always talked up because I thought I knew everything that was going on.”

Ernie alerted General Eisenhower to the profiteering taking place by black marketers in Belgium and France. Turns out producers were selling cheese and milk chocolates cheap to these marketers who would get them loaded onto returning American ships and sell them for far more in the States.

“These guys were getting wealthy during the war, right under American noses,” Ernie later recounted. In addition, the British and French forces were dominating the cable lines preventing Americans from communicating with Washington and other command posts. Ernie told General Eisenhower that something had to be done about it.

“Most of the men were too cowed to speak, but I told Eisenhower about it,” Ernie told Brian Fitzpatrick. “It took several days but all of a sudden we had dedicated cable lines for several hours a day to get instructions and information back and forth from Washington to France.”

The Fight for Brest

The Port of Brest was one of several ports along the northern and western coasts of France. It was not the largest, but it was strategic in that it offered the Allies an excellent deep-water port to accommodate large American cargo ships carrying much needed armored vehicles, food and ammunition to the European front.

Brest was an ancient fortress-like city of 80,000 people fortified by a massive stone wall and moat. Taking advantage of the rolling terrain and deep valleys of the surrounding countryside, the Germans “built trenches, concrete pillboxes, casemates and gun emplacements” from which to launch their defense.

In his history of World War II, *Breakout and Pursuit*, author Martin Blumenson described the scene at Brest. “The Allies had ten weeks to clear the mines, explosives and rubble and put the port into operation before the port would become unnecessary when Antwerp entered into operations on November 29, 1944.” After fifty-five days’ delay amidst relentless bombing of Brest by both Allied and German troops on every street, building, bunker and square, Blumenson described the final penetration of the German garrison:

“At dawn on 16 September, the Crocodiles (Germans) advanced to within eighty-five yards of the fort. After an intensive artillery preparation, smoke shells were placed to cover the outer wall. Concealed by the smoke, three Crocodiles advanced, reached the moat surrounding the wall, and flamed the apertures. At the same time, engineers placed 2,500 pounds of explosive at the base of the wall, and tank destroyers and a 105-mm Howitzer of the regimental cannon company hurled shells against the main gate from a distance of two hundred yards. A breach was torn in the main gate, and the engineer demolition charge opened a hole in the fortress wall large enough for infantry assault. Battered by almost constant fire from the ground and the air for several days, and dazed by the shock of the explosion, the surviving eighty members of the German garrison surrendered.”

The fight to take control of the Port of Brest consumed 1,750,000 rounds of small arms munitions and the efforts of approximately 30,000 troops, nearly twice the number estimated by the Americans.

Ernie received a commendation from Admiral Harold Stark for his work at Brest:

“At the time you entered the city it was completely destroyed and the harbor was effectively blocked. Your party remained after the port was placed under the operational control of the French in order to render assistance to them. Due to the isolated location of your command independent action was necessary. You assisted the French to a great degree in the rehabilitation of the port rendering it valuable to the support of the allied armies forging ahead on the continent of Europe.”

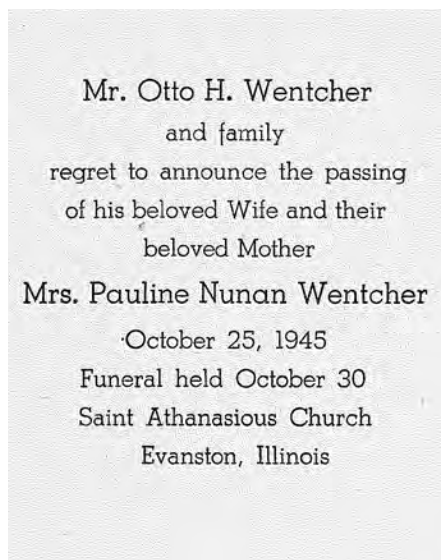
— Harold Stark, Admiral, U.S. Navy

Ernie shared the news of his commendation with his mother:

"I am enclosing the original of a commendation I received much to my surprise for work the enlisted men and officers that I had with me at Brest did. Too bad they picked out the head man and I will have to see what I can do for the boys who did the work."

Following the war, Ernie was assigned to Cherbourg to dismantle a huge naval depot there. Later, he was taken out of operational work and sent to Bordeaux to lead a liaison group for the west coast of France. In June 1945, he wrote:

"Bordeaux is our home and we hate to leave it too often. Nevertheless, this job does not look to be permanent, the war's over and the only reason I was sent down here is the fellow before me got too soft and the place did nothing."



Pauline Wentcher dies

Two months later, Ernie was in a flat in London waiting to move on to The Hague, where he had been appointed attaché to the U.S. Ambassador of Holland. While in London, he ventured out to observe the victory celebrations and encountered crowds stomping around in the streets. He sounded disappointed when he wrote to his sister Celeste that the scene reminded him of an "elephant dance."

In The Hague, Ernie received news that his mother had died suddenly of a heart attack on October 25,

1945. She was only sixty-one. Ernie requested leave and was promised dismissal by Christmas if he stayed, and his father advised him to stay and be discharged. His sister Celeste wrote to Ernie:

“Don’t feel too badly that you weren’t here, because even I on the South Side didn’t see her. When it happened, it occurred so quickly. The priest who came arrived a minute before the end. He said she opened her eyes and seemed to recognize him and then it was all over... If ever a person deserved heaven and peace and happiness—mother certainly should be there. And I believe she is watching over us just as she always was and that now she’ll help us just as much as ever if we ask her. So you pray to her to give you strength to heal this loss of yours, and I’m sure you’ll find her just as consoling as ever.

“Poor Dad is terribly grieved as you know he never once thought of life without her, but as you might also expect he is very brave though he cries quite often... We are all looking forward to your arrival as soon as possible. That will help Dad very much.”

On Christmas morning 1945, Ernie surprised his sisters by returning to Chicago, charging up the stairs of their home, yelling, “I’m home!” When Ernie saw his father the next day, he suggested they take a vacation at a dude ranch in Arizona. Saddling up every morning for a two-hour horse ride, he figured, would help his grieving father.

Among the documents Ernie saved in his files is a letter dated 1950 from Frank Hoffman addressed, “Dear Salcombites.” Hoffman undertook the arduous task of writing to fellow members of the American Forces who had served at Salcombe, a town on the southern coast of Devon, which played a significant role in D-Day preparations. His goal was to connect these men in hopes that they would establish contacts and, perhaps, someday arrange a reunion. Responses came from California and Texas to New Jersey and West Virginia. In his account, Ernie wrote on his personal stationery:

ERNIE C. WENTCHER**29 South La Salle St., Chicago 3, Illinois**

My Naval history at Salcombe goes like this. We were destined to be the advance port party at Le Lorier but that was changed a few miles outside Lorient and instead we represented the Navy at Brest. After Brest was taken, we were established as the port party and given the job of making the harbor operative. This work was done by Navy engineers who were a lot smarter than I was. We had millions of Frenchmen in our hair. As I remember it, we had a good corner on the coal left by the Germans and [for which they] provided cognac and all kinds so we lived comfortably. Foster, Shaw and Lenartz of the Sea Scouts, Flanker and Rickman were with us and the Coast Guard Officer who had a patrol boat but who hadn't received any orders since being sent to Brest and never received any orders all the time we were there. He was a lost man. However, finally his conscience made him ask the Flag for orders and they immediately sent him on a job. Subsequent naval duties took me to Cherbourg where I ran into a lot of our old friends; Bordeaux, where we were working with the French in their maneuvers against Lorient; St. Nazaire and the rest of the pocket ports. This was a great climate and we lived the life of Riley and were soon members of the Chateau set. From Bordeaux I went to London and from there to Holland with the American Ambassador to Holland. This was after the war of course. In 1946 I returned to Chicago where my job is assistant manager with The Equitable Life Assurance Society. I was married on January 3, 1948. I would like very much to see any of the other fellows who happen to come from Chicago.

Ernie remained in the Navy Reserve for the next decade. He received an honorable discharge from the United States Naval Reserve effective October 1, 1956.

VI

BACK TO BUSINESS

“I have known only one thing in my life and that is hard work.”

—Ernie Wentcher

When Ernie returned to Chicago in late 1946, he was a man in his early thirties who had studied, worked and served his country on a total of three continents. He returned to The Equitable Life Assurance Society and accepted the position of assistant manager with his sights set on rising through the ranks as he had during his time in the Navy. “As long as I am on this job nothing will ever cause me to either reduce the intensity or the enthusiasm that I put into my work,” he said.

It was a good time to be in the insurance business. The war was over, and soldiers were returning home to buy homes and start families. By 1950, Ernie was head of his own insurance agency. He got off to a bumpy start, as detailed in a memorandum he sent to the Executive Vice President of The Equitable, “Estimate of the Situation—Wentcher Agency— Since April 1, 1950.” His understanding upon taking the job, he stated, was that he would be provided with competent men experienced in selling life insurance, but, according to his higher ups, he had misunderstood the agreement. Ernie expressed his concerns about the instability and ineffectiveness of his team. He lost some men enlisting in the Army and Navy due to the conflict brewing in Korea, those who were incapable were terminated, and the



Three Veteran Agents Qualify for the SAA

Three more Equitable Agents have qualified for the Superior Achievement Award in recognition of 15 qualifications for the National Leaders Corps. They are: John R. Foulton, CLU (Larson Agency, Salt Lake City); Bernard Shahan, CLU (Weber Agency, Denver); and Ernest C. Wentcher (Hanley Agency, Chicago).

Ernest C. Wentcher

Ernie joined the Warren V. Woody Agency in Chicago in 1935 after completing his formal schooling with a degree in chemistry from



Ernest Wentcher

Brussels Univ., Belgium. The Russian-born Agent also attended school in England. Ernie served in the U.S. Navy during World War II as a Lt. Commander, from March 1942 to Dec. 1945. After his military duty, he rejoined the Woody Agency and was named assistant agency manager in 1946. In 1950 he was appointed manager of an agency in Chicago, and in 1966, after 16 years as an AM, he returned to personal production.

Of his 15 NLC qualifications, six have been at The National Council level, one at The President's Cabinet level. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1968. Ernie won the Gold PGA in 1967 and the Bronze in 1968 and 1971. He is, in addition, a life member of the National Group Leaders Club.

The veteran ESFer has been active throughout his career with the Chicago Association of Life Underwriters. He is also a director of the Chicago Navy League. He is, moreover, chairman of a special committee that helps locate jobs for retired Naval personnel of the Ninth Naval District in Wentcher's locale. Ernie has also acted as a fund-raiser in his home area for the United Fund.

salesmen who remained needed motivation and training.

"My first problem was to make a real effort to organize the men that were at the agency office and make them feel part of a group working together for The Equitable. We needed to place the emphasis immediately on the sale of life insurance," he stated in the memo. "With the introduction of new methods, I feel that we have made some progress."

Ernie knew his value and was not afraid to ask for what he wanted. Time spent recruiting and training prohibited him from focusing on his personal production. He asked to be reimbursed for his financial losses, which he estimated at \$30,000 a year. Nonetheless, he remained a committed company man. "I understand that the higher you go into The Equitable management strata the harder you have to work on placing emphasis on recruiting, modern sales methods and morale."

In another correspondence, he reaffirmed his loyalty to The Equitable. "I have only known one thing in my life and that is hard work, and as long as I am on this job you will get everything I've got, even if I have to build it stone by stone, and you will be glad to hear I work every Saturday." His father Otto never missed an opportunity to praise his son or provide him with advice.

"It was nice to be a guest in your home. I enjoyed our talks while driving—you are good medicine for your father...you are a most competent manager. You can feel very satisfied with your accomplishments. But best of all is the fact that you are still aware of the needs of other mortals and willing to extend a helping hand to so many." Later in the letter, Otto warned Ernie about burning out and encouraged him to take a vacation.

"You will be astonished to see how fit you will feel after such

rest. No half measures—get away and stay away. I hope you will give this some thought. I know you need the pause. Don't drive yourself to exhaustion.”

With his never-quit attitude, Ernie transformed the Wentcher Agency into one of the most successful for The Equitable in the Chicago area. In 1968, at the age of fifty-four, Ernie was enrolled in The Equitable Hall of Fame—a relatively young age at the time—after qualifying for this 10th National Leaders Corps membership. Later, he earned the prestigious Superior Leadership Award and became a lifetime member of the National Group Leaders Club. His professional and philanthropic associations included the Chicago Association of Life Underwriters and the United Fund. He also gave back to his fellow veterans by serving as director of the Chicago Navy League. For the League, he chaired a special committee that helped locate jobs for Navy Personnel of the Ninth Naval District.

After sixteen years, Ernie decided to relinquish his managerial position to devote full time to building a personal portfolio of businesses and real estate, including insurance. He was not afraid to take calculated risks and often closed deals on a handshake because he had the ability to judge people by their character. In the mid 1980s, he bought The Polaris Motel in Cocoa Beach, Florida. The Polaris provided the closest accommodations to Cape Canaveral where astronauts could go to blow off steam. Other interests included a nursery—Ernie sent plants to his sisters on holidays—a Christmas tree farm and a bagel factory. (He was known to show up at friends' houses on weekend mornings with a sack of bagels.)

Arguably, no investment was better than the one he made in his sister Jean. Soon after Jean became a widow, she found work as a secretary in the music department at Northwestern University. Ernie

Ernest Wentcher Earns Enrollment In Hall of Fame

Ernest C. Wentcher, a member of the K. J. Peterson Agency and former agency manager in Chicago, qualified for his tenth National Leaders Corps membership during the month of April, thus becoming a member of Equitable's Hall of Fame.



Ernest Wentcher

A product of the European school system, Wentcher, who was born in Siberia, received his education in England and Belgium, and graduated from the University of Brussels with a degree in chemistry.

In 1935, the year he completed his undergraduate studies, Wentcher came to the United States and joined The Equitable as a member of the Warren Woody Agency in Chicago.

He was named assistant agency manager in the Woody Agency in 1946, and four years later, 1950, was appointed agency manager of his own organization in the Chicago area. After sixteen years, Wentcher relinquished his managerial position to devote full time to personal production in 1966.

A veteran of World War II, Wentcher served with the United States Navy Amphibious Forces in the European Theater and was separated with the rank of lieutenant commander after six years of service. He is an active member of the Chicago Navy League, and the Chicago Association of Life Underwriters.



Polaris Motel

Real Estate Brokers,” John said. The NAR was full of thousands of agents who rode around in their late model Cadillacs. They would work 60 to 80 hours a week and made money but had no organization for buying insurance.”

Ernie believed that was unfair. He figured if he could consolidate them through the national organization, they could receive life and medical wholesale without paying through the nose for it individually. By selling it at the national level the policies would be distributed to these small agencies.



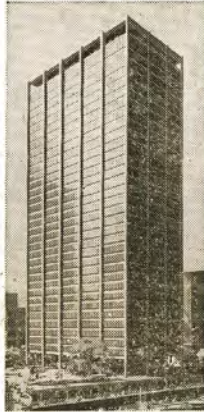
believed she had greater potential and persuaded her to come work for him instead. “You’ll never get anywhere,” he told her, according to Jean’s son, John Halla. Instead, Ernie persuaded her to get into the insurance business and covered the costs for his sister to go to school and become a licensed agent.

“Ernie and my mother came up with the idea of selling life insurance policies to the National Association of

Ernie and Jean landed the NAR deal. In terms of commissions to Ernie and Jean, “it was the gift that kept on giving,” recalled Bea’s nephew John Chamberlain. The siblings made a great team for a number of years. But when Jean decided to retire, Ernie felt betrayed, perhaps due to his high expectations of people.

EQUITABLE IS GROWING IN CHICAGO!

And you can grow with it. Ask any of
the six Equitable Chicago Agency Managers



Soon—a new Chicago headquarters for Equitable. To meet the growing opportunities Chicago has to offer, Equitable breaks ground in May for a dramatic new skyscraper that will tower 35 stories above the Chicago River at Michigan Avenue. Here, in this marvel of modern architecture, Equitable will set up large new offices to serve the Living Insurance needs of Chicago area people better.



Walter Gottschall, Jr.



Calvin D. Kanter, CLU



Llewellyn G. Owens, CLU



Murray Riskin



E. C. Wentcher



Taft Woody

In the past few years, the demand for Living Insurance in the Chicago area has grown tremendously. To meet the demand Equitable is expanding rapidly. And this means new opportunities for men and women to join one of America's greatest institutions. The Equitable is over 100 years old.

Has more than 10 billions in assets. More than 41 billions of insurance in force.

If you are interested in a career where initiative is encouraged and opportunity unlimited, call any of the Equitable Agency Managers pictured above and find out more.



The **EQUITABLE** Life Assurance Society of the United States

Milton F. Weber, Field Vice President
Equitable Building—29 South LaSalle Street
Chicago 3, Illinois Phone: FRanklin 2-0400
Home Office: 1285 Avenue of the Americas, N. Y. 19, N. Y.

Altogether, Ernie spent more than 50 years at The Equitable Life Assurance Society. On the occasion of a milestone anniversary, Raymond B. Dolan, Executive Vice President and Chief Agency Officer at the time, wrote him a congratulatory note saying, “Your 45 years with the Society represent not only a career of the highest ethical standards, but also one of genuine service to your fellow men. You have won the respect, confidence, and admiration of those whom you have served and those whom you have trained.”

VII

SON, BROTHER AND ADVISOR

“The Wentcher kids should thank you for all the things you have given them—good father first—money, second.”

—Ernie Wentcher

Ernie Wentcher took after his father Otto in many ways including his business acumen and love of horses. For them there was always much to talk about. The two maintained a close relationship and they would exchange advice as well as confidences in both professional and personal matters. It was Otto who urged his son to enlist in the Navy before the draft became law. He also helped him get on his feet when he returned to Chicago and started working at The Equitable, closely monitoring his finances. As Otto aged, the scales tipped.

After his mother Pauline died in 1945, Ernie was disgruntled somewhat when a woman from his agency, Hester Bone, began to show interest in Otto, now age sixty-five. She also may have been Ernie’s nemesis at the company. “Hester Bone let Ernie know how she was performing, and he was lacking. If she did not outsell him, she met her quota every month,” explained nephew John Chamberlain.

Edith Phelan, Hester’s daughter-in-law and a family friend, thought the budding romance was good for Ernie’s father. She described Otto as a delightful man who wore a monocle and a beret and spoke French. “When he was in town he’d come over to the house and he and my husband Dick would sit in the back yard and reminisce about their war years. I told Otto that if he didn’t take my mother-in-law off our hands, Dick and I would not remain married!”

Ernie was not fond of Hester Bone, who was some fifteen years younger than his father, and he had much to say on the matter. In a letter to his father on the subject of their relationship, he said,

“I appreciate you taking me into your confidence regarding Hester, this makes me appreciate you that much more. I’ll try and give you my opinion of Hester honestly and then my reaction as to how it would work out + let you be the judge in the end.”

Above all, Ernie and his sisters wanted their father to be happy, so he let him know they would accept whatever decision Otto made. “We kids feel that, and this is very important because it’s sincere, we want you to be happy because we love you.”

Shortly thereafter, Hester Bone became Hester Bone Wentcher and the newlyweds made a home in California. When Otto was eighty-three, Ernie expressed his gratitude to his father in a letter in which he wrote, “The Wentcher kids should thank you for all the things you have given them—good father first—money, second.”

Despite what were sometimes great physical distances between them, Ernie was extremely close and devoted to his sisters. During World War II, he exchanged letters regularly with Celeste and Jean, and in them asked about his sister Natasha who suffered from debilitating arthritis.

Celeste and Ernie had shared an apartment in Chicago for a time; Jean and Ernie later became successful business partners in life insurance, and Ernie was constantly worried about Natasha and thinking up ways to help her. He was generous with all, establishing a trust fund for each sister that ensured them a large stipend for twenty years.

When Chicago winters began to take their toll on Natasha, Ernie wrote to his father and explained that Natasha’s medical bills ran over \$2,000. He felt strongly that she and her husband John should leave Chicago for a more favorable climate. He went so far as to offer to help financially:

“Even though John would make a little more money here, this would all be offset by tremendous doctors’ bills which as far as I can see are coming up fast if Natasha stays here. I would be quite willing to supplement John’s income for the first year while he’s getting started in a new business and even—and this is only a possibility—if he felt that he knew enough about a business, to help finance him in it.”

Natasha moved to Arizona, but Ernie continued to worry about her. He suggested to his father that he and Hester take a trip from California to Arizona and help Natasha get situated. He wrote, "...it would be money in the bank and a great help."

Otto lived in Santa Monica, California, for five more years. He retained his lifelong love of learning as a past president of the Santa Monica Chess Club and through his membership in the Cliffdwellers, a club he founded comprised of individuals in the fields of arts and letters.

Memorial Rites Thursday

Otto Wentcher, Retired Executive, Dies At 88

Memorial services will be held at 4 p.m. Thursday in the Brentwood Presbyterian Church for Otto Wentcher, 88, retired vice president of International Harvester Co., who died Monday.

Mr. Wentcher, 401 Sycamore Road, Santa Monica Canyon, retired to Santa Monica 20 years ago. He was a past president of the Santa Monica Chess Club.

Born in Germany, Mr. Wentcher came to the United States when he was 20 and joined International Harvester. Prior to World War II, he was European and Near East,

—Wed., April 3, 1968

EVENING OUTLOOK

sales manager for IH with headquarters in Brussels. He fled to the United States when the Germans marched on Belgium.

It was the second political uprooting for Mr. Wentcher. He fled from his IH post in Siberia during the Russian revolution in 1917.

A linguist, scholar and patron of the arts, Mr. Wentcher served as an officer of Rotary International in Europe. He was a member of the Cliffdwellers of Chicago and was active in the founding of the

Southern California branch of the Cliffdwellers, a club whose membership comprises those in the fields of arts and letters.

Mr. Wentcher is survived by his wife, Hester Bone Wentcher; three daughters, Mrs. Celeste Chamberlain, Ravina, Ill.; Mrs. Natasha Detmer, Denver, Colo., and Mrs. Jean Halla, Evanston, Ill.; a son, Ernest C. Wentcher, Glenville, Ill., and 12 grandchildren. Also surviving are two stepchildren, Hester Moulding, Dallas, Tex., and Richard A. Phelan, Golf, Ill.

With no children of his own, Ernie took on the role of "godfather" with his nieces and nephews. He believed strongly in the power of education and encouraged them to take the college route and even offered financial incentives. For his nephew John Halla he went so far as to offer him a full ride to the school of his choice. But John knew it would have been awkward for his father if he accepted. He also worried there would be strings attached. "Uncle Ernie expected a high return on investment," Halla noted.

After Jean's husband John Halla died, Ernie became a surrogate father to her youngest son, Peter. "He told my mother he would be responsible for guidance and financial support," said Peter's sister Pauline Halla Mitchell.

Ernie approached Peter—admittedly an indifferent college student—and said, "Look, now that your dad's gone and your mother's trying to build a new future for herself, I'd like you to try and get

all A's. If you do that I'll give you anything you want. A new car. Stereo. Anything within reason."

"I told him I was doing the best I could," Peter said. In retrospect, he concedes that probably wasn't good enough for Ernie. While disappointed, his uncle did not give up on him. Five years later, Peter graduated from college receiving honors in the last semesters.

"Ernie came up after the ceremony and indicated he was proud of what I had done. He still felt I could have done better and he made sure I knew that. But I was grateful for that little bit of praise."

VIII

ERNIE AND BEA

“I never thought much about marriage because I was leading a life that I liked.”

—Ernie Wentcher

Ernie Wentcher was by all accounts a handsome young man, over six feet tall with broad shoulders and piercing blue eyes. He was from a good family, well-educated, and on a clear path to success. In other words, a good catch. The eligible bachelor, however, showed little interest in settling down and thoroughly enjoyed the single life as a twenty-something. “I never thought much about marriage, because I was leading a life that I liked,” Ernie said.

While stationed in Bordeaux after the war, Ernie, now in his early thirties, contemplated what life would be like once he was back home in Chicago. He confided in a letter to his sister Celeste:

“This life over here is fantastique. We have so much of everything but it’s unreal and we’ll all have to settle down to the more real things in life...I have cars, food, liquor at no cost to myself to speak of and I’m tired of it.

“I’ve followed your success in the selling game with pride. I believe you better give it up now and settle down to married life as soon as possible. You and I are very much alike, and it’s difficult to find the right person. What do you think about this? I’m going to find someone the minute I reach the U.S.A.”

The pressure was on. By the time Ernie returned home in 1946 after serving in the military for six years, his three sisters were married. Conveniently, his brothers-in-law were all named John: Celeste to John Chamberlain; Jean to John Halla; and Natasha to John Detmer.

It’s hard to say whether it was a set up or a stroke of luck. One afternoon, Ernie accompanied his sister Jean on a visit to the home of the Lindsays, family friends who lived in north suburban

Winnetka. When they arrived, Ernie observed their daughter Beatrice “Bea” Lindsay playing tennis in the back yard. The first time he had seen “this vivacious and beautiful girl,” he later recalled was on the dance floor at Jean’s wedding reception. Ernie had been dressed in his Navy whites. Now, here she was in tennis whites displaying her remarkable athleticism.

Bea moved in high social circles and was an active member of the Junior League. But one wouldn’t describe her as a “girly” girl. She would take her curling (a sport much like broomball played on ice) uniform of Scottish plaids and a tam hat over perfume and makeup any day. She spoke fluent German, loved Wagnerian opera, and was known for peppering her conversations with German phrases.

The eldest of five children in a close-knit family, Bea attended North Shore Country Day School in Winnetka, played tennis and golf, and spent family vacations in Palm Springs, California, where her parents leased a home each winter.

Despite all Bea’s wonderful qualities, Ernie was a reluctant groom. As his nephew John Halla tells it, “My father said he had to practically twist Ernie’s arm to get him to propose to Bea. He was just having too much fun.”



Bea, second from left

Ultimately, Ernie was convinced Bea was the best woman for him. On January 3, 1948, they were married at the Lindsay's Winnetka home. Following a honeymoon in Cuba, Ernie and Bea settled in Evanston and later moved to suburban Glenview, Illinois. Bea enjoyed cooking and entertaining. Ernie loved to socialize, making them well-suited to one another. Bea was convivial, a good corporate wife, and in a business setting preferred to let Ernie do most of the talking. She was immediately embraced by Ernie's sisters; the four ladies enjoyed having tea, playing cards or bridge and sometimes practicing their language skills by chatting in French.

Everyone knew Bea as a formidable athlete. With the encouragement of her father, she excelled in tennis and golf and competed in curling on a national level. For her athletic accomplishments, she garnered a multitude of trophies and medals, which were proudly displayed around their home.

"Frankly, Bea had a reputation for being better at sports than her husband," joked Chuck Schroeder, a friend from the Glen View Club, which became the central focus of Ernie and Bea's social life. "We first tried to get Bea to play paddle tennis and if we didn't get Bea, we'd take Ernie. She was a tall woman and very competitive. They both were a lot of fun."

In those days Ernie was still working at building his insurance portfolio and investing in other businesses.

"Ernie was so into business all day every day; that was his life. My mother and her sisters had a 'come to Jesus meeting' to tell their brother that he could not just call at 7 p.m. to say [to Bea] he had an extended meeting and wouldn't be home for dinner. This was their sister-in-law and they wanted her to be treated well!" said his niece, Pauline Halla Mitchell. But Ernie knew time at the office would pay off.

Why Ernie and Bea did not have children was rarely, if ever, discussed. Whether they did not wish to be parents or tried unsuccessfully, it is not clear. If parenthood was not in the cards for the couple, Ernie and Bea took an interest in the lives



of their nieces and nephews, always generous to them during the holidays and on birthdays.

“Auntie Bea and Uncle Ernie would take us on excursions to a Chicago Cubs baseball game or invite us to Glen View for dinner. She made all of us feel special,” recalled her niece Laura Bordine, the daughter of Bea’s youngest sister Isabel. At Pine Lake, the Wisconsin summer house that Martin Lindsay bought and left to his five children, Ernie would always be organizing events. Often Bea would be alone while Ernie was on business trips. It was during those occasions that she could spend time with any of her eighteen nieces and nephews who happened to be at Pine Lake.

The Wentcher nieces and nephews held their aunt and uncle in high regard. By all accounts they were a tall, attractive couple with an outwardly formal demeanor. Children were expected to behave respectfully, yet also participate in conversations once they became young adults.

“We children welcomed them with much fanfare. We’d stare out the front window waiting for their arrival. When we were very little, Mother was so excited when they would come for a visit, you’d think we were expecting royalty,” said Alexandra Halla Barazzone with amusement. “We had to sequester our dog and straighten up the house and then wait until we were called into the room to say hello and have a short visit.”

The Halla children may have welcomed the couple as though they were royalty, but their aunt and uncle were anything but intimidating. “Aunt Bea always had a smile. She would get down to my level and ask me how school was or something about my life,” Alexandra said. “She listened intently and liked to relate our latest bids for attention to Ernie.”

Pauline Halla Mitchell remembered when her aunt and uncle came to call. “My oldest brother John had things to report, his interests in school, the skating rink he put together in the back yard, or his tinkering around with old radio parts to see how they operate,” she said. “I was shy around them and preferred to be in the background. I worried they would ask a question I didn’t know the answer to.”

Visits to Uncle Ernie and Aunt Bea’s home were equally memorable. “It was always fun to go to their house,” said nephew John Chamberlain, son of Ernie’s sister Celeste. Fun and brisk. Ernie was notorious for keeping the thermostat set to 65 degrees and family members jokingly referred to the house as a meat locker. Ernie and Bea slept with big comforters on their beds. They were, in nephew John Halla’s words, ‘sweater people’ and that’s what they liked.”

John Halla and his sister Pauline enjoyed an extended stay with Bea and Ernie after a grease fire in the Hallas' kitchen rendered their house uninhabitable. "It was wonderful," John recalled. "I had a beautiful breakfast every morning of hand-squeezed orange juice with lots of pulp, all the bacon, eggs, muffins, butter and jam we could eat. After I mowed the lawn on a Saturday, Bea would call me in for lunch and would have prepared a meal with fine china and silverware, linen napkins. She had cooked everything herself."

Ernie and Bea's was an "adult" house. Oil paintings purchased on their European travels covered the walls of their home. Otto Wentcher's

exquisite Persian rugs were displayed on the floors. They loved to read and the shelves in their living room and library were crammed with books. If they had a television set, it was rarely turned on.

"No kids meant no toys, games or junk food. But Aunt Bea would sometimes stock up on treats when nieces and nephews were visiting. She was a warm-hearted woman, she just didn't display it to everyone," John Halla said.

One aspect of their Uncle Ernie that provided humor for his nieces and nephews was his flamboyant wardrobe, whether it was a pinstripe suit with a wild tie or pocket square handkerchief. "That was just part of his personality," said Laura Bordine. (It was also well known that Ernie was color blind. Occasionally he would show up in attire that didn't entirely match, requiring Bea to



The Halla family



Cottage D at Glen View Club

put together outfits before he left the house.)

Ernie and Bea remained on Maple Lane for a number of years before moving to Cottage D on the grounds of Glen View Club. At Glen View, they immersed themselves in the clubby lifestyle they both loved. They opened their doors often to neighbors and friends, hosting dinners and cocktails parties. “Uncle Ernie was a total extrovert. If he could be the center of attention wherever he went he would be happy,” observed Laura Bordine.

Bea Wentcher had a mind of her own, said those who knew her. Looking to buy a new car from her brother-in-law John Halla, who worked at a car dealership, Bea wasn’t interested in anything the dealership had available. She wanted to order it from the catalog and pick the color—flaming hot red.



Bea and Ernie

“Bea, that won’t have any resale value!” John cautioned. “Nobody wants a red car.” Bea looked him firmly in the eye and said, “John, it’s *my* money. It’s what I want. Order the damn car!” (In keeping with her understated personality, the car was a Buick not a Cadillac.)

Bea Wentcher passed away on September 8, 1996. She was eighty-five. “[Bea] was a wonderful friend and sister-in-law,” wrote Ernie’s sister Celeste, “one in a million.” Edith Phelan echoed the sentiment. “She was the epitome of a lady, always did everything right.”

IX

A LIVELY COMPETITOR

“We knew he was lying and he knew he was lying. That’s why we called him ‘Way Out Ernie.’”

—Chuck Schroeder, Tennis Partner

Ernie liked to be around people and people liked to be around him. If he wasn’t at the office, you would likely find him at the Glen View Club.

He and his tennis pals would typically play a few sets on Saturday and Sunday mornings, gathering at the courts a few minutes early to catch up on the week and then stay for lunch and a beer. John Bitner, a regular in Ernie’s tennis group, remembered that Ernie liked to tease his buddies on the court. “When he played tennis and you hit a good shot he’d say, ‘Out!’ That was his favorite,” said Chuck Schroeder. “We knew he was lying, and he knew he was lying.” Others recollected that Ernie would call a shot out and then quickly add “...of my reach.” In any case, his banter earned him the nickname “Way Out Ernie.”

Ernie also loved a good practical joke. One summer, while Bea was on a trip to Africa, John Bitner and his wife invited Ernie out for dinner. Ernie showed up with a “mystery woman” and the hosts were shocked.



Ernie

“It wasn’t until a couple of weeks later that we learned it was his sister Jean,” Bitner said. “I think he wanted to see how quickly it got back to the rest of the tennis pals.”

At Bea’s family home at Pine Lake in Wisconsin, Ernie was an organizer as well as a lively competitor. Richard Helmholz, a Wentcher Foundation board member and law professor at the University of Chicago, was related to Bea by marriage. He described one summer in the 1980s, when Ernie staged a tennis tournament.

“House guests had arrived at Pine Lake from Germany and England that summer and so Ernie dreamed up a special event. He called it The Annual Pine Lake International Tennis Tournament,” Helmholz recalled, “and by compiling a largely fictional account of the ability of the contestants, the worldwide renown of the tournament, and the extent of the local interest it had sparked (in reality, it was a couple of neighborhood kids that had come by to see what was going on), Ernie then sent this account to the local weekly newspaper, The Lake County Reporter, and much to everyone’s amazement—but not Ernie’s—they printed it!”



*Back row, left to right: Lindsay Helmholz, unknown youth, Bea Wentcher, Bill Stark, Ernie, David Lindsay
Front row, left to right: Alice Helmholz, Judy Stark, Kay Lindsay*

Small Luxuries

Throughout his life, Ernie had a reputation for being frugal. Keeping the thermostat in his home set to 65 was the least of it. Though he could have bought himself just about anything he wanted, he opted to spend just enough to be comfortable. He never once purchased a new car and often shocked people when he pulled up in his dated Buick. “Ernie could have afforded a Rolls Royce, but he wasn’t a car guy, it didn’t matter to him,” said his nephew John Halla. For years he was driven around in a gold-colored Infinity, an early luxury car that by his later years was falling apart.

“Not only did it handle poorly in Chicago winters, it was difficult to get in and out of and required multiple people to help him,” recalled Brian Fitzpatrick. Desperate for a solution, Brian negotiated a good price on a certified used Toyota Highlander with a perfect seat height for Ernie. However, when the ever-so-frugal Ernie heard the price, he refused to sign the contract. He claimed he had



Ernie and Brian

never spent that much on a car in his life and he was not about to! Only after Brian got an offer on the Infinity that was well above Blue Book value did Ernie agree to sign for the Highlander. He loved having made a (small) profit on the Infinity.

When the color on his Sony television started going and the screen was becoming too difficult to see, Ernie ignored suggestions to buy a new one even though he loved to watch the news, sports and movies. “I love that TV!” he insisted. One day, while Ernie was at a dentist appointment, Brian sneaked a new television into his bedroom. “Everyone expected Ernie to erupt once he noticed it,” Brian remembered. “He took his index finger and he pointed at the television and said, ‘You know what that is? *That* is a miracle!’”

X A GENIAL HOST

After Bea passed away, Ernie said goodbye to Cottage D at Glen View Club and made the apartment office he maintained on Michigan Avenue his permanent home. The apartment was conveniently located across the street from Restaurant 410 in the Wrigley Building, where Ernie could often be seen hosting a half dozen friends and business associates. He particularly liked the restaurant because the staff treated him like a VIP and had a regular table waiting for him, as did P.K. Wrigley, chairman of the chewing gum company for which the building was named. On those occasions, Ernie seldom spoke about personal or business matters, as he preferred to discuss national and world affairs, according to friends and associates.

Michael Levin was Ernie's banker and a frequent guest at one of his luncheons. "At the end of a conversation he knew more about you than you did about him," observed Levin. "That's probably why he was so successful in business. He was always interested in what was going on with other people, you and your family."

Yet when it came to talking about his own past, Ernie revealed only bits and pieces. "He never gave you the whole story and would leave you wanting more. He wasn't a man to be pushed, you had to coax it out of him," said friend and fellow Glen View member Dick Ross.

Ernie soon decided it would be wise to hire an administrative assistant to help keep his financial matters in order and asked a friend to help him find the right person for the job.

Norma Berfield had just retired from many years as executive secretary to the president of a packaging company when she received a call from Ernie's friend who asked if she would like to work a couple of days a week. Norma had financial obligations that required her to continue

working, so even though she had already found a job at the Westin Hotel, she agreed to meet with Ernie.

“He had a very engaging personality and could talk you into anything,” said Norma. She told him she wasn’t sure she wanted to go back to work. He replied, “You get out of that job and be here Monday morning.’ That was 1991. Norma worked for Ernie for the next twenty-four years.

By the time Ernie was in his late eighties, with the exception of Norma, who would come to 535 Michigan Avenue a couple of days a week, Ernie did not have much in the way of companionship. While reading the *Chicago Tribune*, a classified ad grabbed his attention. Ernie



Norma Berfield, Pedro Gamboa and Ernie

asked Norma to call this man named “Pedro” who he thought might be someone he should meet.

Pedro Gamboa, it turns out, was an immigrant from Venezuela who once worked for two U.S. Ambassadors and lived for a time in France. Although he was not as big or as strong as Ernie was hoping, Pedro impressed him because he spoke French. He hired him to come to the apartment each morning and keep him company until the evening when he went to bed. In the late afternoon, Pedro would pour him a whisky and they would watch the news together. Pedro was an excellent cook who lovingly prepared his employer’s favorite dishes, such as steak with butter and pepper, fish and vegetables, hamburgers and soups. They played bridge, watched western movies, went for walks and, most importantly, conversed about everything from Chicago politics to Ernie’s service in World War II. They would argue often over any number of things but in the end, Pedro spent a total of ten years with Ernie.

“He was a very happy person who loved to talk,” Pedro said, still amused at his former boss.

XI

ERNIE'S LEGACY: A SCHOLARSHIP WITH A DIFFERENCE

"There's nothing wrong with the young people of this country that I can see."

—Ernie Wentcher

Very much on Ernie's mind in his later years was what his legacy would be after he was gone. He had retired from a successful career in the insurance business and wondered how he could put his money to the best use. As a businessman he recognized there were a lot of good jobs out there and kids who were capable of doing the work. The problem was they couldn't afford to go to college to be even considered for the jobs. He began to ask himself if he could somehow make a difference in the lives of young people.

Harry Brown, a longtime friend, remembered when Ernie confided in him about an idea that



Ernie with Nancy and Harry Brown

dawned on him while crossing a street in Chicago's Loop. "Why should I leave this money in a trust for when I die? Why don't I do something about it now when I can see and enjoy the results?" Ernie questioned. "That's when he changed his will and set up the foundation. I'm glad he did because he got a lot of enjoyment out of it," Brown said.

The Ernest C. Wentcher Educational Fund was established in 1997. Original

directors included Ernest Wentcher, president; his sister Jean Wentcher Hoff, vice president; Norma Berfield, secretary; Attorney Stuart Duhl, assistant secretary; Richard Helmolz, Vincent Agnew, and Brian Fitzpatrick.

The question uppermost in the board's mind was where would the educational fund have the most impact? Initially, the board targeted trade schools in order to equip student with skills that addressed the high unemployment that plagued Midwest manufacturers at the time. Ernie's sister Jean Wentcher Hoff then approached Chicago Public Schools to expand the scholarships to deserving Chicago high school students. Within a few years the scholarship fund was made available to students at Oakton Community College who wished to pursue four-year college degrees.

Early board member Marilyn Appleson was Director of Development at Oakton at the time. She described Ernie as having a twinkle in his eye and an ability to put people at ease.

Race Blind

"He was so enthusiastic. I was worried in the beginning because Oakton has a lot of foreign students and students of color," Appleson said. "Interestingly for someone of his background and generation, he was race blind. He took an interest in each one of them."

Being a student of people's character, Ernie wanted to meet each of the applicants individually. Interviews were held in mid-April and students would arrive at Ernie's apartment where he would "jolly them up," as he would say. Sitting in his wing chair in his living room, he would ask them about their families, their progress in school—he insisted on at least a B average—and always give them advice on deportment and enunciation. "Listen to me," he would say. "If you want to be something in this world, you have to be able to speak clearly. Take a speech class."



*2014 Wetcher Board of Directors, left to right
Richard Helmolz, Marilyn Appleson, Norma Berfield,
Lucy Tuck, Brian Fitzpatrick*

After their interview with several board members, the students would come back and continue talking with Ernie, seeking his advice.

“He loved it,” said Brian Fitzpatrick. “There was Ernie with a United Nations of diverse students sitting around him and he was so comfortable.”

In funding the scholarships, Ernie had definite ideas about prerequisites. The scholarships would be limited to Chicago area high school students and divided equally between men and women; they would be for four years and require strong grades. Eligibility required high financial need and U.S. citizenship, although Ernie later revised that to consider compelling exceptions. Over time,



*Ernie discussing the three criteria
for selection*

scholarships would be given only for undergraduate education and would not apply to study abroad. Selection criteria expanded to include character, leadership, a high degree of involvement, strong communication skills and overcoming challenges.

Ernie also believed that students should hold down jobs while in college. “Ernie got to where he was because he worked hard. He didn’t believe in shortcuts, didn’t like the idea of handouts,” said Stuart Duhl, Ernie’s attorney who provided legal advice in setting up the Wentcher Foundation. “He wanted to give money to young people who were looking for opportunity and were willing to work for it.”

XII

WENTCHER EDUCATIONAL FUND BY THE NUMBERS

“The common denominator of kids we select? They’re doers.”

—Ernie Wentcher, 2013

Looking at Ernest Wentcher’s life, it was inevitable that education would be the focus of his philanthropy. The son of a German-born, self-taught businessman who spoke five languages, and an Irish-born teacher, the product of an elite boarding school education, and a World War II Navy Intelligence officer, all paint the picture of a man steeped in learning.

Though a consummate salesman who reveled in friendships and relationship building, he often acknowledged that it was his education that equipped him with the skills and the confidence to



Jean, Ernie, Dr. Margaret Burk Lee,
President of Oakton Community College, 2005



Tribune photo by Charles Osgood
Ernest Wentcher gets to know
 students who receive scholar-
 ships from his foundation.

Handing out more than just a grant

Retired exec doesn't
just give scholarships,
he builds personal ties
with those he assists

By Jon Anderson
 Tribune staff reporter

Ernest Wentcher, a retired insurance executive, was crossing a busy street in the Loop when a great idea hit him.

"I had been listening to friends of mine talking about their rotten kids and the difficulties of getting them into college," he recalled Tuesday, sitting in his retirement office, an art-filled suite on an upper floor of an apartment building on North Michigan Avenue.

"That kind of gruff talk rubbed him the wrong way.

"A lot of other kids simply don't have the money to get into college," he thought to himself.

So, eight years ago, while

50¢ City & Suburbs, 75¢ Elsewhere
 1997 YEAR—NO. 307 © CHICAGO TRIBUNE

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2005

NORTH SHORE

Chicago Tribune

FINAL

succeed, and hard work that turned his early years into a record of achievement.

So, when Ernie realized that he could make an impact on the lives of young people by providing them with a college education, he moved quickly to form the Wentcher Educational Fund.

Currently, there are three Wentcher Scholarship Programs:

- Chicago Public High Schools
- Oakton Community College
- Oakton Wentcher Scholars Transfer Program

The first ten Wentcher Scholars were selected from Chicago Public High Schools in April 2002; all ten graduating four years later. In June 2003, ten Oakton Community College students, five men and five women, were selected as the first Oakton Community College Wentcher Scholars and received up to \$2,500 per year for the college's two-year program.

Oakton Wentcher Scholars who continue to meet the Foundation's criteria have the opportunity to apply for Wentcher's Oakton Transfer Scholarship, which provides up to \$10,000 per year to help students continue their education at four-year universities.

From an initial investment of \$35,000, the foundation that carries Ernie's name has awarded in excess of \$20 million in scholarships to more than 1,000 recipients. Each year the number of applicants continues to grow from 100 in 2002 to 762 in 2022.

After the evaluation of 762 applicants who met all qualifications, that number was reduced to 243 finalists and an additional 53 alternates. Of those, the foundation selected 96 new CPS Wentcher Scholars.

Wentcher Scholars have attended 176 colleges and universities in over 35 states. Their numbers include Ph.D.s., doctors, teachers, bankers and engineers, as well as lawyers and accountants. Non-profit consultants recognize the Wentcher Foundation as “the highest performing scholarship provider” and “employing every best practice in the field.” The University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana identifies The Wentcher Scholarship as the largest provider of funds to its students by far.



Ernie with Wentcher Scholar and Board Member, Robert Slay at the 2009 Wentcher Scholar celebration (a graduate of Curie Metropolitan High School and DePaul University)



Ernie with Wentcher Scholar Semiratou Koba (a graduate of Senn High School and Olivet Nazarene University)



Wentcher Foundation Staff

Left to right – Theresa Pfister, Brian Fitzpatrick, Nia Harris and Linda Hoffmann



*Left to right – Laura Bordine, Robert Slay, Richard Helmholtz,
Lucy Tuck, Brian Fitzpatrick, Bob Wise, Laura Farr, Dan Williams*



Ernie with Wentcher Scholars

CURRENT WENTCHER SCHOLAR STATS

388

Wentcher Scholars are currently enrolled

115

US colleges and universities currently educate Wentcher Scholars

3.6

Wentcher Scholar average cumulative GPA

115

new Wentcher Scholars awarded in fall 2021

THE WENTCHER SCHOLARS

HIGHLIGHTING THE RICH DIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



Chicago Public High Schools of current CPS Wentcher Scholars
 Suburban schools of current Oakton Wentcher Scholars

Wentcher Scholars come from every Chicago neighborhood and suburban high schools connected to Oakton Community College.

We are intentional about increasing educational equity for high character, high-achieving students of every race and ethnicity from selective enrollment, charter, vocational, career academy, military and neighborhood public high schools.

Wentcher Scholars mirror the diversity of Chicago Public Schools students and our annual pool of applicants.

Of our current 388 Wentcher Scholars:

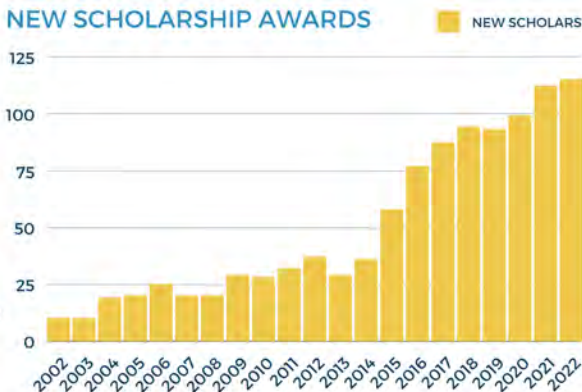
- **53% Female, 46% Male, <1% Non-binary**
- **30% Hispanic, 26% Black, 17% White, 16% Asian, 8% Other, 3% Two or more races, and <1% Native American/Hawaiian**
- **Hail from 63 of the 77 Chicago Community Areas**
- **Wentcher Scholars attended 75 different area public high schools**

SCHOLARSHIP STATS

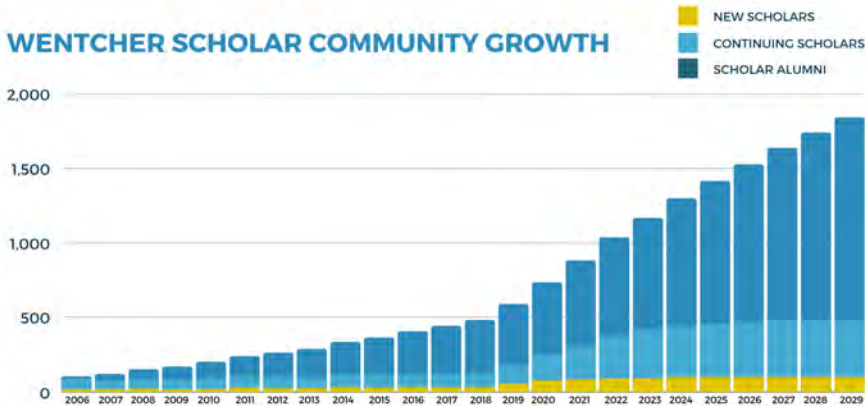
Beginning with ten scholarship awards in 2002, the Wentcher Foundation has experienced significant growth, most recently awarding 115 new scholarships in 2022 across three programs.

With over 1000 current Wentcher Scholars and alumni, and with our endowment poised to run in perpetuity, we anticipate committing to 100+ new scholarship awards a year, which will double the total size of our Wentcher community by 2029.

NEW SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS



WENTCHER SCHOLAR COMMUNITY GROWTH



At our committed rate of growth, **the Wentcher Scholar Community will double in size by 2029.**

\$3.6 MILLION

in scholarships is invested and committed to support the higher education of each new class of Wentcher Scholars.

\$20+ MILLION

has been invested in scholarships supporting over 1,000 Wentcher Scholars to date.

Colleges Attended by Wentcher Scholars

Agnes Scott College, Decatur GA	DePaul University, Chicago IL
Albion College, Albion MI	DePauw University, Greencastle IN
American Intercontinental Univ., Atlanta GA	Dominican University, River Forest IL
Arizona State University, Tempe AZ	Duke University, Durham NC
Augustana College, Rock Island IL	Eastern Illinois University, Charleston IL
Ball State University, Muncie IN	Elmhurst College, Elmhurst IL
Bard College, Annandale-On-Hudson NY	Emerson College, Boston MA
Bates College, Lewiston ME	Emory University, Atlanta GA
Boston College, Chestnut Hill MA	Ferris State University, Big Rapids MI
Bradley University, Peoria IL	Fisk University, Nashville TN
Brown University, Providence RI	Florida A&M University, Tallahassee FL
CA Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks CA	Florida State University, Tallahassee FL
California State University, Fullerton CA	Georgetown University, Washington DC
Carleton College, Northfield MN	Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta GA
Carroll University, Waukesha WI	Governor's State University, University Park IL
Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland OH	Hampton University, Hampton VA
Chamberlain School of Nursing, Chicago IL	Harold Washington College, Chicago IL
Claremont McKenna College, Claremont CA	Harvard University, Cambridge MA
Clarke University, Dubuque IA	Howard University, Washington DC
Colgate University, Hamilton NY	Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago IL
Colorado College, Colorado Springs CO	Illinois State University, Normal IL
Columbia University, New York NY	Indiana State University, Terre Haute IN
Concordia University, Chicago IL	Jackson State University, Jackson MS
Connecticut College, New London CT	Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo MI
Cornell College, Mt. Vernon IA	Kendall College, Chicago IL
Cornell University, Ithaca NY	Knox College, Galesburg IL
Dartmouth College, Hanover NH	Lake Forest College, Lake Forest IL
Denison College, Granville OH	Loyola University, Chicago IL
	Marquette University, Milwaukee WI

M.I.T, Cambridge MA
 Michigan State University, East Lansing MI
 Michigan Tech University, Houghton MI
 Middlebury College, Middlebury VT
 Millikin University, Decatur IL
 Milwaukee School of Engineering,
 Milwaukee WI
 Morehouse College, Atlanta GA
 Morgan State University, Baltimore MD
 National Louis University, Chicago IL
 New York University, New York NY
 North Carolina A&T State University,
 Greensboro NC
 North Central College, Naperville IL
 Northeastern University, Boston MA
 Northern Illinois University, DeKalb IL
 North Park University, Chicago IL
 Northwestern University, Evanston IL
 Occidental College, Los Angeles CA
 Ohio State University, Columbus OH
 Oxford College of Emory, Oxford GA
 Pitzer College, Claremont CA
 Pomona College, Claremont CA
 Purdue University, Calumet IL
 Purdue University, W. Lafayette IN

Richard J. Daley College, Chicago IL
 Rhode Island School of Design, Providence RI
 Roosevelt University, Chicago IL
 Roosevelt University, Schaumburg IL
 Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology,
 Terre Haute IN
 School of the Art Institute, Chicago IL
 Smith College, Northampton MA
 Southern Illinois University, Carbondale IL
 Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville IL
 Southern Methodist University, Dallas TX
 Spelman College, Atlanta GA
 St. Edward's University, Austin TX
 St. Joseph's College, Rensselaer IN
 St. Olaf's College, Northfield MN
 St. Xavier University, Chicago IL
 Stanford University, Stanford CA
 Swarthmore College, Swarthmore PA
 Trinity College, Hartford CT
 Tufts University, Medford MA
 Tulane University, New Orleans LA
 UCLA, Los Angeles CA
 University of Chicago, Chicago IL University
 of Cincinnati, Cincinnati OH

XIII

EXPANDED SUPPORT OF WENTCHER SCHOLARS

Throughout its first 25 years, the Wentcher Foundation has steadfastly adhered to its mission of providing college scholarships to Chicago area high school seniors based on their high character, academic excellence and financial need.

Ernie's goal was to lend a "helping hand" which included funding \$7,500 per year for four years, requiring a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.0 and continued good citizenship. Ernie viewed his scholarships as an investment in young people who might not have gone to college, and he expected them to work hard and get high grades in return. He had a "tough love" approach to his scholars with high academic expectations. If a student fell below a 3.0 cumulative GPA, the scholarship was suspended until grades improved.

Recognizing the deterrents many of its scholars face in order to achieve graduation, however, the Wentcher Foundation carefully considered and responded to the needs of its scholars to support their success. The formal mission statement of the Wentcher Foundation expanded to include:

Tutoring and Academic Counseling

Experience with more students helped the foundation realize that first generation, low income and diverse students often need additional support to level the playing field. Beginning in 2012, a second phase was based on the recognition that Wentcher Scholars not only lacked funding, but also often lacked parental advice, access to counseling and tutoring and support for mental health issues. The importance of graduating from college became the emphasis.

The goal line was moved from "to school" to "through school" when Wentcher staff became more directly involved with student support by providing check-ins and encouraging Wentcher



*Ernie Wentcher, Jean Wentcher Halla, Marilyn Appleson,
Former Director of Development, Oakton Community College, 2003*

Scholars to use campus support services. Eventually, a third-party Student Assistance Plan was provided to Wentcher Scholars with a variety of counseling specialties and virtual tutoring was made available through an organization called Chegg by which students receive tutoring by college faculty.

Psychological and Mental Health Counseling

As they transition to college, students tend to experience a great deal of stress; this is especially true for Wentcher Scholars who are dealing at times with serious legal and socioeconomic problems in their families over which they have little control or resources to draw upon.

Through the implementation of our current strategic plan, the foundation has made a significant increase in the level of support for Wentcher Scholars through both our staff interaction as well as a variety of resources from Perspectives Student Assistance Plan. Perspectives SAP is available 24/7 and can be accessed three ways: Over the phone, providing Master's and Doctorate-level

SAP counselors to answer questions or assist with useful appropriate resources. Online, with information, resources, and tools for a vast number of issues ranging from parenting and child care to health and wellness (stress, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and personal relationships) career development, workplace training and more. Or “Live Chat” connected with a counselor anytime for the aforementioned issues.

Career Preparation

Although Wentcher Scholars have graduated at the high rate of 93%, and, on average, have very high grade point averages, many do not have the career guidance, coaching or mentoring to compete for jobs for which they are academically qualified. Recognizing this, a third phase of support evolved include various forms of *career coaching, counseling and access to internships*. The foundation is working on expanding the reputation of Wentcher Scholars to enhance their access to career opportunities. The foundation continues to enhance communications with Wentcher Scholar alumni and to develop the Wentcher community. In coming years it hopes to connect scholars with alumni through mentoring relationships and expanding career opportunities with internships and jobs.

The goal line has moved again and is redefined as “to and through college and into one’s chosen career or postgraduate education.” As a result, today the Wentcher Foundation mission statement is “To provide college scholarships and academic, personal and career support to Chicago area high school seniors who are selected based on their character, academic merit and financial need.”

The foundation remains dedicated to sustaining Ernie’s vision and honoring his legacy in perpetuity. To maintain our commitment to his vision and dramatically expand the number of Wentcher Scholars and the programming that supports them, the foundation also balanced Ernie’s frugality with the need to increase the staff and expand its board of directors to support the growing organization. The two newest members of the board are Laura Farr (Wentcher Scholar ’06) and Robert Slay (Wentcher Scholar ’13).

The foundation initially grew incrementally in its early years. Ernie would provide enough

funding each year to cover the costs of the scholarships. In 2010 and again in 2011 Ernie decided to begin to endow the foundation with more permanent funding. It was also in 2011 that Ernie asked Brian Fitzpatrick to become the foundation's president. Although he originally turned down the role not wanting to upstage the founder, Brian eventually accepted. Brian was also the executor of Ernie's estate, along with the BMO Harris Bank, which allowed for a smooth transition of Ernie's investments into the foundation's endowment over a four-year period.

Following Ernie's death, a series of significant changes ensued. The board brought in consultants Suzanne Campion and Kelly Dettmann (their firm appropriately named NextLevel) to outline a plan for developing and staffing an independent organization. This included establishing a solid operational base and staffing model, developing a financial plan and process for achieving its deployment goals (minimum distribution requirement), increasing the annual recruitment and scholarship award activity, and generally building the capacity and resources of the Foundation to achieve its mission while growing its endowment.

The Wentcher board participated on four board committees as outlined in the foundation's bylaws – Investments, Governance, Finance and Planning. The Planning Committee focused on identifying growth opportunities to align with the growing endowment. In addition to establishing a staff of initially three which grew to five, the committee supported increases in the number and amounts of scholarships and establishing pilot programs to support struggling Scholars. The foundation also replaced their outside audit firm, selected a new investment advisory firm and established a pro bono relationship with the law firm Winston Strawn.

Having achieved its operational goals established in 2013, the Planning Committee recommended to the board that a new strategic plan should be developed to identify a vision and path forward for the next five-year period commencing in fiscal 2020. The goal was to provide the board and staff with refreshed organizational objectives and direction reflecting both the capacity of the foundation's resources and mission within the context of the current economic and educational environment.

The foundation was fortunate again to find additional outstanding consultants to help guide the development of the strategic plan, Colette Hadley, Senior Director of Consulting Services of the education not-for-profit National College Attainment Network and Raph Mannino of BCG.

Raph and his team provided initial research and recommendations in the Spring of 2019 after which NCAN led the initiative including fielding a survey to Scholars and interviews with staff, board, and industry resources. The recommendations were initially presented in the fall of 2019 and reviewed at the January 2020 board meeting. The foundation staff subsequently reviewed and prioritized the recommendations. In 2021, the board reviewed the plan progress to date and refreshed its goals and priorities for FYE 2022.

Through new and innovative services and the hard work and personal commitment of the staff, the foundation's reputation, and more importantly, the support for and reputation of what it means to be a Wentcher Scholar has been enhanced. The foundation is in a far better position to support the success of current Wentcher Scholars, alumni and the development of the Wentcher community.

Enhancing the Image of a Wentcher Scholarship

It was from consultant Colette Hadley's observation that while the board recognized the foundation's inward focus on smooth and efficient operations, quality support for current Wentcher Scholars and a high caliber selection process, it missed the opportunity to promote the extraordinary quality of Wentcher Scholars. Because the foundation did not seek donations nor to be more public in its activities, the Wentcher name, the Wentcher Foundation and most importantly, Wentcher Scholars were not receiving the recognition from potential employers, graduate schools or fellowship opportunities they deserved.

The foundation addressed that oversight by hiring the non-profit marketing and communications firm of Prosper Strategies who helped create a communications strategy to raise the recognition of Wentcher Scholars. That led to a new Wentcher Foundation website, regular use of social media, high-quality annual reports and development of high-quality content including blog posts capturing the unique stories of both current Wentcher Scholars and Wentcher Scholar alumni. Enhancing the reputation of Wentcher Scholars is now well established as a primary goal of the foundation.

XIV

WENTCHER SCHOLAR PROFILES 2022

The strength of the Wentcher Foundation is its alumni as well as its current Scholars. In the next few pages you will meet just a few of the thousands of Wentcher alumni who are making a positive change in the world, as Ernie would have expected.



Kira Cook

Lincoln Park High School, 2002

Arizona State University, 2006, B.A., Campus Immersion

University College of London, M.A., Modern Literature in 2008

Emmy awarding winning actress, producer, director and writer

A Wrigleyville native and now a professional actress, Kira Cook has always been a star. She recalled being a young girl around the age of seven selling advice to Cubs' fans in the neighborhood on game day. Charging only a dollar for her opinions on career changes, love relationships, and anything else, she found herself always making more than expected. Most people didn't have change, so they gave her larger bills. They were always so amped up from the game that it didn't really seem to matter to them.

Kira attended Lincoln Park High School's IB program, and later enrolled in the Honors College at Arizona State University as a Wentcher Scholar. A member of the first class of Wentcher Scholars, Kira graduated from Arizona State in 2006 with an English literature major and a French minor. During her time at Arizona State Kira founded the school's on-campus literary magazine, worked for the college newspaper, and studied abroad for a year. Kira spent half a year in Rome, and the other half in Grenoble, which is in the south of France.

Kira began her acting career early, starting out as a child actor in first grade. She starred in plays, TV shows, and commercials. In sixth grade, she landed her first big role in the movie “Matilda,” where she played Hortensia.

Kira admits that by the time she entered high school she was exhausted with the demands of auditions and shows, so she didn’t act at all until college when her interest was rekindled when she landed a role in ASU’s rendition of the famous play “The Vagina Monologues.”

After college Kira only applied to master’s programs in Europe because she loved her study abroad so much. She enrolled at the University College of London where she received her master’s degree in modern literature in 2008. At the time she was getting her master’s, her mother was making a film on Mackinac Island where horses and carriages were the only way to get around. The producer of her mother’s film pitched the idea of a series about islands around the world without cars. The show got picked up by PBS, and Kira was asked to be the host. During her time as host of “Islands Without Cars,” Kira visited twenty islands.

Currently, Kira is starting her first podcast, a collection of interviews with people that have interesting jobs, called “You Do What Now?” Kira is writing her second screenplay, a dark comedy about a dysfunctional family and her first children’s chapter book series. She is a mom to two children.

Kira had some advice for Scholars wanting to work in the entertainment industry. Be passionate! This applies not just to entertainers but anyone because when people are passionate about their work, they work harder and are knowledgeable about their craft.

When asked about her experience being part of the Wentcher Foundation’s first class she said, “It’s extraordinarily special.” This year Kira volunteered during the new Scholar selection process for the first time and was extremely impressed with the students she met.



Palak Desai

Lane Technical College Prep High School, 2002

University of Chicago, 2006

Rush Medical College, M.D., 2010

Residency - Rush University Medical Center, Chicago, 2013

Fellowship - Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, 2017

Director of the AMITA Saints Mary and Elizabeth Medical Center Cancer Institute

An Albany Park native, Palak Desai, MD graduated from Lane Tech High School and became a member of the first class of Wentcher Scholars in 2002.

After graduating from Lane Tech, Palak attended the University of Chicago where he majored in biology. Palak told us that students at his alma mater wear a t-shirt inscribed with a longstanding joke about the University of Chicago: “Where fun goes to die.” Although Palak did feel the effects of UChicago’s rigorous workload, he was determined to make sure that fun was part of his time there. At UChicago Palak played intramural volleyball, football, and basketball. He served as both the Vice President and President of the South Asian Students Association (SASA), danced in the annual shows for SASA and the Filipino Student’s Association, was a member of the fraternity Delta Kappa Epsilon, and was the Teacher’s Assistant for several biology classes. Additionally, Palak worked in a viral oncology lab where he performed research on the Herpes virus to study how doctors could potentially use viral vectors to treat different cancers.

After graduating from the University of Chicago in 2006, Palak began medical school at Rush University. When he first entered medical school, Palak was unsure of what he wanted to do. Initially he thought of doing surgery. He completed a summer orthopedic surgery fellowship at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. However, he realized that life in the operating room wasn’t for him. Palak told us that he developed a preference for diagnosis and treatment and decided on Internal Medicine. In 2013 Palak completed his residency at Rush University in internal medicine where he had several rotations in hematology and oncology. These rotations led him to become an attending hospitalist in the Leukemia department at UChicago for a year after his residency. Palak then served three years as a fellow in hematology and oncology for at LSU

Medical Center in New Orleans.

He is currently the Director of the AMITA Saints Mary and Elizabeth Medical Center Cancer Institute. As a hematologist and oncologist, Palak is usually the first physician a patient sees once they receive a cancer diagnosis.

Once the pandemic began, Palak also treated COVID patients who were prone to blood clotting.

We asked Palak what his favorite part of the job was, and said it was making connections with patients, which he finds enriching.

Palak also shared that the most challenging part of his job is understanding that a patient with advanced cancer may not be cured. Giving his patients a prognosis is difficult.

Given his heavy workload, Palak emphasizes the importance of maintaining work-life balance. He enjoys spending time with family and friends, watching and playing sports, and traveling.

When asked what it meant to him to be one of the first Wentcher Scholars, Palak recalled that growing up on the North Side of Chicago, the University of Chicago was always a dream for him. Upon acceptance, the Wentcher Foundation took a lot of stress off of him financially. He's grateful that the Wentcher Scholarship allowed him to make the most of his UChicago experience and take advantage of all that the campus had to offer.



Nicholas Pearce

Whitney Young High School, 2003

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, S.B., Chemical Engineering and Management, 2007

Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management, M.S.,

Management and Organizations, 2009, Ph.D., 2012

Fuller Theological Seminary M.A., Theology, 2020

Clinical Professor of Management & Organizations at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management

Founder and Chief Executive Officer of The Vocati Group,

Assistant Pastor of Chicago's historic Apostolic Church of God

Author of "The Purpose Path: A Guide to Pursuing Your Authentic Life's Work"

Dr. Nicholas Pearce is a native of Chicago's South Side. Following graduation from Whitney Young High School, he was accepted at MIT, became a Wentcher Scholar, and was honored with several other awards and scholarships. He earned his B.S. in chemical engineering & management from MIT with a concentration in religious studies and went on to earn an M.A. in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary and an M.S. and Ph.D. in management & organizations from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

He now serves as an award-winning organizational behavior professor at Northwestern's Kellogg School, is the founder and chief executive officer of The Vocati Group, a boutique global management consultancy, and assistant pastor of Chicago's historic, 12,000-member Apostolic Church of God. He is also the author of a bestselling book, "The Purpose Path: A Guide to Pursuing Your Authentic Life's Work."

An internationally recognized thought leader on values-driven leadership and organizational transformation, Dr. Pearce has served as a trusted adviser, executive coach, and sought-after speaker for over 200 leading corporations, social impact organizations, communities of faith, educational institutions, and government organizations on six continents. Nicholas is deeply committed to community impact, serving as a trustee, board member, and adviser for many community organizations, and has also given back to the Wentcher Foundation as a volunteer interviewer and keynote speaker at the annual Wentcher Scholar Celebration.



Jasmine Omeke

Whitney Young High School, 2010

Harvard University, B.A., Social Studies, 2014

DePaul University, M.A., Computer Science, 2018

Senior Software Engineer at Netflix in San Francisco

Hitting the ground running after transferring in her junior year to Whitney Young HS, Jasmine Omeke poured herself into her studies. She also volunteered in her community and pursued creative writing with the After School Matters program. Her strong character, outstanding academic accomplishments and financial circumstances lead to her selection as a Wentcher Scholar, a Gates Millennium Scholar, among others, and she headed off to Harvard University. Four years later,

Jasmine graduated Cum Laude with a BA in Social Studies with a focus on Urban Planning. She was also a recipient of a Fulbright Research Fellowship, which she used to undertake an independent research project at an African Music Archive in Frankfurt, Germany.

Shortly after, Omeke earned her MS in Computer Science at DePaul and pivoted into the tech industry. She then became a software engineer at Braintree, a division of PayPal. Jasmine is currently a senior software engineer at Netflix in San Francisco and has returned to give back to the Wentcher Foundation over the last six years by serving as a candidate reviewer, interviewer and a keynote speaker at our annual Wentcher Scholar Celebration. In her spare time, she likes to paint, travel and read mystery books.



Rafal Sobota

Hubbard High School, 2003

University of Chicago, B.S. Biological Chemistry, 2007

Vanderbilt University, M.D., Ph.D. Genetic Epidemiology, 2011

Neurologist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital

ICU Fellowship at Northwestern beginning on July 1, 2022

Born in Krakow, Poland, Rafal Sobota moved to Chicago in 1998, just in time for Michael Jordan to retire and for the Bulls to decide that competitive basketball was no longer of interest to them. Once he got over that, he went on to study biological chemistry at the University of Chicago, where he developed an interest in research and medicine.

In medical school at Vanderbilt, he fell in love with neurology, both in the classroom and on the wards. Rafal joined the Medical Scientist Training Program and graduated with a Ph.D. in genetic epidemiology. During his Ph.D. training he studied malaria in Mali as part of the Fogarty International Clinical Research Scholars program and wrote his doctoral thesis on genetic predisposition to tuberculosis in East Africa.

Going forward, Rafal plans to combine his clinical and research interests as part of the PSTP program at Northwestern University. He intends to explore the interaction between host and pathogen genetic variation, and how it influences the clinical trajectory of given neuroinfectious diseases.



Mee Mei Zhao

Hubbard High School, 2005

University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, B.A. in Finance and Actuarial Science, 2008

Life Insurance Financial Analyst for the Winged Keel Group

Mee Mei Zhao always dreamed of traveling the world. Being a first-generation immigrant, she realized the one thing that would help her realize that dream was education. Mee Mei had to work extra hard just to catch up with her classmates whose parents could help them with homework.

In high school, rather than hang out with friends, she studied constantly taking multiple Advanced Placement classes and exams to earn college credit in order to minimize the cost of college.

She recalls meeting Ernie Wentcher before her interview and listening to him speak to all the candidates, wanting to know about them. Receiving the Wentcher Scholarship enabled her to attend college and graduate, the first in her family, in just three years and without the pressure of student loans. As a result, she could afford to move to New York City, find a job in finance, and save money for travel. Mee Mei took a year off and visited nineteen countries. It was the best experience for obtaining life skills, she noted.

Today, Mee Mei is a Life Insurance Financial Analyst for the Winged Keel Group. Her goal is to give back not only financially but with her time and her experiences. “No one is born with all the knowledge and skills required for life,” she said. “You keep at it, remain persistent, and learn. When you fall, get back up because that is the only way to go in life. That is what the Wentcher Scholarship instilled in me-- hard work, persistence, and generosity.”



Toccara Castleman

Currie High School, 2006

University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, B.S., Media Studies-Mass Communications, 2010

2020 Emmy Award Winner and Fade to Black Festival Playwright Winner

Director of Digital Strategy at Chicago's Goodman Theatre

As one of the early recipients of the Wentcher Scholarship, Toccara Castleman remembers meeting Ernie Wentcher. She was in the International Baccalaureate program at Currie High School at the time. When she was awarded the scholarship in 2002, he treated her to lunch and was genuinely interested in her plans for the future, she recalled. That meant a lot to an 18-year-old young woman with a head full of dreams.

The scholarship gave her the opportunity to focus on her studies and enjoy the full breadth of her college experience without having to worry about the financial burden of higher education.

The support provided by the Wentcher Foundation staff each semester inspired Castleman. To this day, this proud South Sider strives to apply the same values of the foundation—dedication, compassion, excellence and community—to her personal and professional life.



Maryam Hanif

University of Illinois, Chicago B. S., Bioengineering, 2009

University of Illinois, Chicago, M. S., Bioengineering, 2012

Staff Engineer, Talis Biomedical Corporation

Maryam Hanif was born in the UAE to Pakistani parents who moved to the United States when she was thirteen. Since sixth grade it was her dream to be an engineer, although she acknowledges it was a challenging path especially being the only female in the room.

Hanif was a member of one of the earliest classes of Wentcher Scholars in 2005. She recalls meeting Ernie Wentcher at his apartment before her interview. The event became a family affair when her immigrant parents accompanied her to the interview. While her dad and Ernie exchanged

stories about their lives and travels, Maryam sat quietly, semi-embarrassed and quite nervous. Ernie, she said, put her at ease much like a kindly grandfather would.

Receiving the Wentcher Scholarship changed Maryam's life, notably because she and her twin brother and younger sister would have been in college at the same time, a financial impossibility for her parents. It also enabled her to pursue her dream of becoming an engineer and "breaking barriers."

Since completing graduate school Maryam has been a mentor for women in science and engineering fields, some of whom have become colleagues. She believes a helping hand, in whatever capacity, is always appreciated.



Robert Slay

Curie Metropolitan High School, 2009

DePaul University, B.S., Accounting and Finance, 2013

Internal Auditor for Google

Wentcher Foundation Board Member

A Chicago Lawn native, Robert Slay has been working as an internal auditor for the past seven years.

Currently working for Google, Robert's career has afforded him some adventurous experiences. Embracing the challenges his job continues to offer him, Robert has immersed himself in other cultures and gained a worldly perspective through travel. His business travels have taken him to such places as Amsterdam, Poland, London, Paris, and Mexico City, where he experienced about five earthquakes! Robert says that in the future he hopes to do more domestic travel. New York City is first on his list.

Robert became a Wentcher Scholar in 2009 after he graduated from the Curie Metropolitan's IB Program. He became an alumnus of the program in 2013 upon graduating from DePaul University, where he double majored in accounting and finance with a concentration in internal audit.

After graduating, Robert decided to pay it forward and become involved in the success of the Wentcher Foundation. He volunteered to read scholar applications, conducted interviews, and joined the Wentcher Task Force to find ways to help students. After working on the Task Force for

about a year, in 2020 Robert was asked to become a board member, a role he thoroughly enjoys.

Robert enjoys getting to know students and helping to implement new changes that help students excel in college. Most of all, he enjoys helping students with financial need pursue their dreams.

Robert's advice to students is to be involved on campus in order to gain perspective outside of academics. "Not only does it look good, but you also get to learn a lot about life and yourself," he observes. "You can make strong connections that can last a lifetime!" He advises students to be their best selves by continuously challenging themselves and not allowing other people's opinions to impact their decisions.

When Robert is not auditing or attending to his board member duties, he is running, spending quality time with his loved ones, listening to music, admiring the solar system, and grilling, even in the wintertime.



Jeanine Botwe

Whitney Young Magnet High School, 2011

Emory University, B.A., Human Health, 2015

Fordham University School of Law, J.D. 2020

Associate Counsel, NBC Universal

Leaving the South Side of Chicago and starting a new life at Emory University would never have been possible without the Wentcher Scholarship. "The Wentcher Foundation represents not only philanthropy but also integrity. It kept its word, which allowed me to pay my tuition on time. It was also the first step in achieving a law degree," said Jeanine.

She has not forgotten the investment the foundation made in her. As a result, Jeanine intends to be a woman of her word, continuing to give back through mentoring aspiring law school students.



Tramell Moore

Manley Career Academy, 2011

University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, B.A. History, 2015

Law School Student at DePaul University Law School

Tramell Moore graduated from Manley Career Academy in 2011. As a Wentcher Scholar he attended UIUC and graduated in 2015 with a degree in history. Following his undergraduate education, he taught with Teach for America and is currently attending DePaul Law School where he is President of the Black Law Student Association (BLSA).

Tramell is a regular volunteer for the Wentcher Foundation and has participated as a reviewer, interviewer and main speaker at our new Wentcher Scholar celebration. Tramell is grateful for his Wentcher Scholarship and said, “For my family and where I come from, without programs like Wentcher, it simply wouldn’t have been possible for me to attend college. This is an opportunity for me to give back.”

In describing new Wentcher Scholars, Tramell stated, “I am personally very intimidated when I meet the new Scholars, they get better and better every year! I honestly don’t know how I would have fared if I had to interview now. The new Scholars constantly surprise me with their talents and achievements.”

Tramell’s advice for Wentcher Scholar alumni who haven’t volunteered before: “While volunteering is time consuming, it’s important to think about how beneficial it can be to both you and the student. I feel so good after I do it! We want programs like this to keep going and direct as much of their staff resources and funding directly to students. As alumni, we are the best qualified people to serve as interviewers because we can reflect and share our program experience.”



Ashley Gordon

Gwendolyn Brooks High School

DeVry University Advantage Academy, Associates Degree, 2014

University of Illinois, Chicago, B.S. Finance and Accounting, 2018

Senior Accountant, Standish Management, LLC

Ashley Gordon has had her eye on a goal for as long as she can remember. As a youngster, she was determined to be financially independent and smuggled candy into school that she sold out of her locker. Throughout elementary school her goal was to be the best soccer player she could be. The plaques, medals and trophies that fill the basement of her family's South Side Chicago home tell the story.

When a neighborhood student was killed in a gang brawl, her plans to attend the local high school quickly changed. Because of her grades, and at the insistence of her single mom, she secured a spot at Gwendolyn Brooks High School, where she participated in dance, volleyball, and drama. A heart issue since childhood got in the way of a likely soccer scholarship.

In her junior year of high school, Ashley made a difficult yet practical decision and transferred to DeVry University, a commuter school, in order to take advantage of a free scholarship that would give her an associate degree and 60 credit hours toward college. While it meant leaving her friends and extracurricular activities behind, Ashley thought it was more fiscally responsible.

Accepted at UIC in her senior year, the money she had earned over three summers was not nearly enough to pay for tuition. Receiving a Wentcher Scholarship changed everything. It enabled Ashley to live on campus and use the resources of the university without having to commute home late at night.

A Certified Public Accountant, Gordon volunteers at UIC's business school and sits on panels to help advise students what to expect in a corporate setting. She devotes time to the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA) where she provides student and professional members with professional development opportunities. She is determined to give back by mentoring those who want to go to college and beyond. "That's what the Wentcher Scholarship provided to me," she said.



Jaeda Branch

Morgan Park High School, 2014

University of Chicago, B.A. Comparative Human Development, 2018

Community Learning Facilitator at Lincoln Park Zoo, Chicago

Jaeda Branch was no stranger to rigorous work during high school at Morgan Park. The sheer amount of work in the International Baccalaureate program might have intimidated some students, but Jaeda felt it prepared her for a full course load at the University of Chicago. But it was the people behind the Wentcher Scholarship that motivated her to keep going at a school known for its tough academic environment.

With the support of the Wentcher Foundation staff, Jaeda pushed herself to continue when she was struggling. It was an email she received one day that put a smile on her face and let her know that everything would be okay. It read:

“Can’t tell you the roar that went up among us in the office when we saw your last two transcripts. We are, as always, Team Jaeda! Keep up the good work!”



Troy Boccelli

Walter Payton High School, 2014

Harvard University, BA, Economics, 2018

Analyst at Hines (a global Real Estate Investment Firm)

Growing up in Chicago’s Little Village, Troy Boccelli dreamed of going to college but knew it would be financially impossible. Still, his father, a waiter, and his mother, a realtor, made education a priority. Fortunate enough to gain admission to top-rated Walter Payton College Preparatory High School, he participated in the school’s mentoring program during freshman year and bussed tables on weekends at the restaurant where his father worked. For the next three summers he took advantage of a college readiness program at the University of Chicago for Chicago Public School students. Those activities paid off when he was accepted to Harvard University.

With college looming, Troy searched online for scholarships through the Chicago Public

Schools. He was struck by the philosophy behind the Wentcher Scholarship—that it is not a handout but an investment in the individual to make a positive contribution to society. “When someone makes an investment in you, you are all the more likely to want to give back and to make the most of what you’ve been given,” he reasoned.

The Wentcher Scholarship allowed him to fully devote himself to academics while holding down part time jobs that included cleaning dorm bathrooms—“a team building experience.” After graduation, Troy returned to Chicago because he wanted to make a difference in the city whether through volunteering or advocating for kids coming out of Chicago Public Schools who hope to attend Harvard. Long term, Troy intends to teach in the Chicago Public Schools. That, he said, would be his best version of giving back—to teach kids who were once in his shoes.



Sarah Martin

Northside College Preparatory High School, 2014

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, B.A. Global Studies, 2018

Currently teaching English as a Foreign Language in Chicago
Middle schools

A Budlong Woods resident, Sarah received her degree from UIUC in Global Studies concentrating on East Asian Cultures. Additionally, she completed minors in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Linguistics, and East Asian Languages and Cultures, which inspired her decision to pursue a Guest Teacher position in South Korea.

Prior to relocating, Sarah became very familiar with the language and culture in South Korea. She tells us that she’s been consuming Korean media since her young teenage years, and she took Korean language courses every semester in college. “Ironically,” she says, “the only time I did not take Korean language courses was in 2017, when I studied abroad in Seoul for six months.”

Currently, Sarah is supplementing middle school English as a Foreign Language curriculum at two different public schools where she can teach anywhere between three to six classes a day. In addition to teaching, Sarah runs after school clubs for students, and has been designing summer English camps.

While working with students may be her priority, Sarah makes sure to continually immerse herself in Korean culture. In her free time, she has traveled, attended musicals and concerts, eaten delicious food, and met some wonderful friends to share these adventures with. These days however, she says that she is doing much less of all of the aforementioned and much more of her introspective hobbies which include reading, writing, and expanding her music palette.

Before Covid, Sarah said she had her own English classroom, but has since had to downsize to visiting the homerooms of her students. She told us that she really misses having her own classroom because, “it was an English exclusive space where kids could visit me between classes to just say hi or to ask about something or to show me something they were interested in or even try to teach me some Korean.” However, she still finds a way to enjoy her work. She still has her after school programs and clubs where sometimes she takes her kids out to the playground or gardens for activities if they’re not disrupting anyone else.

With almost three years of teaching behind her, Sarah has learned so much from her experience in South Korea. She tells us that she’s had her tolerance and patience tested. Also, she’s discovered some unexpected limits for what exactly she can grin and bear—whether from work or living situations or public institutions in a foreign country.

After returning home to Chicago this fall, Sarah said her main goal is to set down some roots and hopefully find some friendly connections to lay a foundation for the future. However, first and foremost, she’s aiming for a solid rest! Sarah says that she would love to continue working with students of all ages and may venture into speech pathology.



Francisco Herrera

Prosser Career Academy, 2015

Illinois Institute of Technology, B.S. Chemical Engineering, 2019

Environmental Protection Engineer at the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

In a low income, immigrant family in which Francisco Herrera grew up, obtaining a college degree was not seen as a priority. He struggled through elementary school just to read and write. In middle school, he became fascinated with science and mathematics and his academics started to improve drastically. In high school, Francisco continued to build his foundation in STEM and improve his academics. He wanted to prove to people and to himself that he was capable of becoming an engineer.

Receiving the Wentcher Scholarship not only made it possible to get a higher education; he believes the scholarship instilled in him leadership skills, integrity and compassion to understand other people's circumstances. Most important, it gave him the all-important boost in confidence.



Vera Demchenko

Lane Tech High School, 2015

University of Colorado, B.S., Astrophysics, 2019

Systems Engineer at Lockheed Martin

A native of both Budlong Woods and Rogers Park, Vera Demchenko graduated from Lane Tech High School and became a Wentcher Scholar in 2015.

Vera started off college as a double major in chemistry and general astronomy. But space was her real passion and after two years she switched from general astronomy to astrophysics. Despite the changes, she still graduated on time in 2019, receiving her bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado in Boulder.

Currently, Vera is a Systems Test & Verification Engineer on Orion, a crewed spacecraft which is part of the Artemis program. The goal of the Artemis program is to land the first woman and next

man on the Lunar South Pole and establish a sustainable lunar presence in preparation for sending humans to Mars.

As a systems engineer Vera works on the electrical subsystems of the spacecraft, testing and verifying them to make sure they are in compliance with the customer, which in this case is NASA.

Coming out of undergrad, she knew she was interested in space policy and data analysis, but it was difficult finding jobs in the space industry without an engineering background. She learned that systems engineering was a good avenue for her to pursue because it's more interdisciplinary than most forms of engineering. Systems engineering requires good communication skills in order to coordinate between different organizations. "It also requires you to see the bigger picture and utilize critical thinking," she said, something that astrophysics studies had already prepared her to do.

After years of networking Vera landed her role at Lockheed Martin in Colorado. Though not trained to think within an engineering framework can put her at a slight disadvantage at times, as a systems engineer she says she can catch things that her engineer peers cannot.

When asked what she's the most excited about, Vera didn't hesitate: Artemis 1, an uncrewed space mission scheduled to launch around the beginning of 2023. Right now she is happy to be working on a project that allows her to be a part of the human spaceflight program and loves learning about how everything works to enable human space travel. "The best part of my job is being able to see a big picture, bigger than myself, bigger than this planet," Vera said. She hasn't been to space yet, and she's not sure if she ever will because she's afraid of heights. Still, Vera loves the idea of being able to touch the Moon and Mars through spacecraft exploration missions.

In the future, Vera would like to pursue a business development role in the space industry, which entails bidding on contracts for spacecrafts, writing proposals, and developing relationships with potential clients for business opportunities.

For anyone looking to pursue a job in the space industry Vera encourages people to apply for jobs or college programs even if you feel unqualified. She suggests asking people you trust to review application materials if you have any doubts. Lastly, don't be afraid to take time to figure things out.

In Colorado, Vera hikes in the mountains enjoying the evergreens and crisp air. She stresses the importance of prioritizing your mental health, and she makes sure to take time for herself. In

college she was part of a Tango club, and these days she is trying to get back into Salsa, Swing, and Tango dance classes.



Amanda Hoyne

Whitney Young, 2016

New York University, Tisch School of the Arts, BFA, Film and
Television, 2020

Media Coordinator at Group Nine Media in Chicago

When the pandemic struck, Amanda relocated to Chicago and has been working as a media coordinator for a millennial-focused media brand titled Group Nine. As the company's media coordinator, she manages media assets, working to archive items and fill in the holes that have popped up in production since moving to a remote work environment.

“Working in production during COVID has definitely been challenging given that production is usually done in person and COVID has required the work to be remote,” said Amanda. However, despite its challenges, Amanda finds joy in her new job because it allows her the opportunity to come up with more creative solutions to problems that would have otherwise been remedied with a quick solution.

Additionally, Amanda says that although the work is remote, she has found Zoom to be a nice way to connect with people. She has seen a change in the work culture noting that people have been a lot more flexible since the pandemic.

Prior to being Media Coordinator at Group Nine, Amanda interned at a small production company and worked at Saturday Night Live for two years.

Asked if she had any advice for those looking to work in the entertainment industry, she emphasized the importance of making connections, which is how she obtained her first job. “It’s important to be genuine when networking and even when you get the job. If people like you, they will definitely ask you to work with them again.” She also stressed the importance of keeping an open mind. “It may not start off super glamorous. You may just be getting someone’s coffee in the beginning.” She also noted that while in school it’s helpful to keep an open mind about what you

want to do. Amanda started off at Tisch wanting to be a film editor, but during her time at NYU, she fell in love with sound and music. Her advice to students is to take as many courses in as many different areas as possible!

Eventually, Amanda sees herself moving back to New York to continue working in entertainment. For now she is enjoying the freedom of remote work which allows her to do what she loves while being surrounded by her loved ones back home in Chicago.



Jonathan Diaz

Prosser Career Academy, 2016

University of Illinois, Chicago, B.S., Civil Engineering, 2020

Intern, Army Corps Pathway Program of the US Army Corps of Engineers

Jonathan Diaz is a Montclare native and Prosser Career Academy alumnus. He graduated from UIC in 2020 with a degree in civil engineering and is in his second year of the Army Corps Pathways Internship Program. As a Pathways Intern, Jonathan mainly rotates among departments assisting other engineers on their projects using systems such as mapping and computer-aided design. Typically, his projects deal with ecosystem restoration or flood management in the Midwestern region. The main goals of his team are reversing ecosystem degradation by helping wildlife, improving air quality, and improving water quality.

Overall, Jonathan says that he has genuinely enjoyed his experience in the Pathways Internship Program, citing the biggest lessons he has learned is how to be a team member and a real engineer. In the Civil Engineering program at UIC, Jonathan felt that the learning was more theoretical and problem solving. However, in the internship program, Jonathan physically works on a team and makes real-world applications to the problems that he is solving.

We asked Jonathan how he came to the Army Corp's Pathway Internship Program. He said it was specifically one of his professors at UIC who worked for the Army Corps and knew of Jonathan's interest in civil engineering. Jonathan told us that he had a personal relationship with his professor and would always listen to details of the environmental projects his professor worked

on which piqued his interest in the program and led him to apply.

After completion of the second year in this program, Jonathan will officially become a member of the Army Corps of Engineers. He says that the process of transitioning from intern to member is fairly simple. At the end of the year, Jonathan gets a choice of three departments from which the Corps will find an opening for him.

Ultimately, Jonathan says that his life goal is to restore ecosystems around the world by improving waterways, making sure clean water is accessible to everyone, developing environmental perspectives to solve problems, and enacting plans that benefit wildlife and people simultaneously. He says that learning about various environmental problems has truly inspired him. This is why he advises people interested in pursuing a similar career path to be more confident and tackle projects with a positive mindset even if they don't have much experience in that department.

We asked Jonathan what he does outside of being an engineer, and we were pleasantly surprised to hear all the many ways that he keeps himself busy. Overall, he loves music and is currently learning piano, but he also has a wide range of tastes in artists. Kendrick Lamar, Tyler the Creator, Arctic Monkeys, Bad Bunny, J. Balvin are the artists that he says reflect who he is right now. Jonathan is also a member of a running club and will begin running races soon. Lastly, he likes to read and is a member of an unofficial book club, where he is currently reading the book *Dune* ahead of seeing it in theaters.



Ester Perez

Lincoln Park High School, 2016

Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, B.S., Chemical Engineering,
2020

Data Validation Engineer at Marathon Petroleum Corporation

An Albany Park native and Lincoln Park High School alumna, Ester Perez graduated from Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in 2020 with a degree in chemical engineering. During her time at Rose-Hulman, Ester was very involved on campus. She was a member of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE), and Alpha Chi Sigma, a fraternity specializing in the fields of the

chemical sciences. In her senior year, Ester took on a leadership role as the Vice President of SHPE.

Currently, Ester works in the corporate office of a petroleum refining company as a Data Validation Engineer. Prior to landing a full-time role, she interned with the company during the summer of 2018 in the Environmental department and the summer of 2019 in the Technical Service department.

In her role as a chemical engineer, Ester uses software such as Petro-SIM and works closely with kinetic and linear programming (LP) modelers to provide accurate yield data. From the corporate office, Ester is focused on gathering and analyzing data and maintaining data quality for the refineries. Some of the work includes providing data for the kinetic and LP models, troubleshooting mass balances, and developing visualization and analytical tools.

In terms of her immediate future, Ester says that she is hoping to move out of the corporate office and into the refinery, where she would continue to work as a chemical engineer. She'd be troubleshooting and optimizing the reactors, distillation towers, and other separating equipment. Long term, Ester hopes to become a Technologist. As a Technologist, Ester would have expertise on one refinery process and become the go-to person for troubleshooting and optimizing said process. Ester says that most people in this role have twenty years of experience or more working with their process and are known as subject matter experts.

We asked Ester what it has been like to be a woman of color in STEM, and she told us that she has faced moments where people have talked over her. Similarly, she has had experiences where her male peers have tried to convince her she was wrong about something when she knew she was right, which is why it is important to her to be knowledgeable on the topic and know her facts. At the same time, she says that she has found inspiration in older female engineers because she noticed their confidence when speaking and their extensive expertise.

In terms of advice for future female engineers or really any engineer, Ester says to be confident, speak effectively, don't doubt yourself, and stand your ground when being unfairly challenged. Additionally, she advises not to shy away from taking on new projects, be open to learning and receiving criticism and, finally, to ask questions! Ester emphasizes that it is always better to ask questions rather than to pretend to know something.

The last question we asked Ester was what music keeps her motivated as a chemical engineer.

She told us because she works in Ohio where the diversity in population is vastly different from Chicago, she likes to listen to regional Mexican music. It keeps her grounded and serves as a reminder of her friends and family back home.



Noel Miranda

Lane Tech College Prep High School, 2017

North Park University, B.A. Criminal Justice and Sociology, 2021

Noel grew up in the Avondale area of Chicago and attended North Park University where he majored in criminal justice and sociology, graduating *summa cum laude*. During his time at North Park, Noel volunteered as a teacher's assistant at Hibbert Elementary School where he conducted a sociology project with 1st graders. In his project, he studied the school's language program and how it impacted its students. He concluded that certain dual language curriculums favored Mexican Spanish-speaking students which isolates and delays the learning of children from other ethnicities who speak different dialects of the Spanish language.

After college, Noel began the long hiring process for the Chicago Police Department. Many members of his family were police officers and the security of a government job was appealing. After seven months, however, Noel decided to make a career change and pursue carpentry.

Noel said the idea took root in his senior year in college when he took some life skills courses. He began to question what he wanted out of life, and if becoming a police officer was right for him. Even though his parents wanted him to have a government job, his mom was very supportive of his decision, but his dad took a while to come around.

While working for his girlfriend's uncle who is an independent carpenter, Noel is learning the trade. He is also on the waitlist to join America Carpenters Regional Council, where he would do a four-year apprenticeship. Upon completion of the program, he will become an official member of the Carpenter's Union.

Asked what he enjoys about carpentry, Noel observed that it requires math, something he loved when he was younger. "The math in carpentry involves algebra and geometry and a bit of trigonometry," he noted.

So far, Noel does not view what he does as work; in fact, he's been having a lot of fun, which tells him that carpentry was right for him. Ultimately, his goal is to own apartment buildings and do the remodeling himself.

Outside of carpentry Noel enjoys working on cars, likes to fish and hunt, and works out often to relieve stress. We at the Wentcher Foundation are extremely proud of Noel for pursuing a career that makes him happy.



Jack Timperley

Maine South High School, 2017

Oakton Community College and Northeastern Illinois University,
B.A. Philosophy and Business Administration, 2021

Jack Timperley is a public speaker, fundraiser, entrepreneur, comic book writer, as well as a professional superhero, “Captain Marrow.”

A Park Ridge native and Maine South alumnus, Jack graduated from Northeastern Illinois University with degrees in Philosophy and Business Administration.

Before attending Northeastern, Jack began his higher education journey as a Wentcher Scholar at Oakton Community College. At the time his plan was to complete two years at Oakton and transfer to IIT as a Mechanical Engineering major. Plans began to change when he took courses in philosophy and business, which opened his eyes to different possibilities.

At Oakton he was a prominent student leader as the student trustee of Oakton's Student Government, Director of Honors and Action of their Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society chapter, and the Editor-In-Chief of *OCCurrence*, Oakton's student newspaper which Jack helped to revive during his time there.

After two years, Jack received the Wentcher Foundation Transfer Scholarship, designed to help Wentcher Scholars of Oakton Community College pay for two years of community college and then transfer to four-year institutions to finish their degrees.

At Northeastern, Jack was a part of Northeastern's Honors Program and served as a student senator for Northeastern's Student Government. Jack says that he is extremely grateful for the

opportunity to complete two degrees at Northeastern with no debt and gives thanks to the Wentcher Foundation for helping to make that happen.

Inspired by his own recovery after a bone marrow transplant, Jack has partnered with the Be the March Foundation, a part of the National Bone Marrow Donor Registry Program, and travels to comic conventions to encourage people to become donors. He is busy promoting his own LLC, “Captain Marrow,” while doing public speaking and writing comic books on behalf of Be the March.

Jack has yet to attend a convention officially as Captain Marrow as he is awaiting the finishing touches on costume, which is being Sponsored by Ironhead Studios, the same studio that works on Marvel and DC costumes. Ultimately, Jack said in his role as Captain Marrow he is looking forward to inspiring people to help save lives as well as inspire those going through hard times.



Abigail Afriyie

Evanston High School, 2017

Oakton Community College and School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) anticipated graduation in spring 2022.

An Evanston native and Evanston Township alumna, Abigail Afriyie is currently studying Fine Arts at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC).

Before transferring to SAIC, Abigail attended Oakton Community College for two years where she was one of ten Oakton Scholars to receive support from the Wentcher Foundation. Abigail received her Associates in Fine Arts from Oakton in the Spring of 2020. As a recipient of the Oakton Wentcher Transfer scholarship, Abigail was funded for two years at Oakton Community College and for an additional two years at SAIC where she is completing her bachelor’s degree. Abigail told us that she decided SAIC would be the best college for her to transfer to because it had the best location to explore her passions. Staying close to family and home was important to Abigail as she is the daughter of Ghanaian immigrants and had spent the first fifteen years of her life traveling back and forth between Ghana and the US.

At SAIC, Abigail is enrolled in the school’s rigorous Fashion Design program, which is centered on men’s and womenswear. In addition to that, she is diversifying her skill set through other

fashion courses such as accessory design, shoe design, and fashion illustration. During her time at SAIC, she has been featured on the front cover of her school's fashion magazine and on its website. Although Abigail focuses on fashion, she explores different mediums including painting, photography, and filmmaking, all of which she really enjoys.

Over the summer, Abigail was part of an Arts Fellowship at the Chicago Center for Arts and Technology. During her fellowship, she worked as a Teaching Assistant for a class called Wearable Sculpture. After two months, Abigail was given gallery space at the center to host her own exhibit for two weeks.

Titled *Rebirth Through the Light*, the central theme around Abigail's exhibition was her personal testimony of coming out of the darkness and into the light through her faith in God. She wanted to express how she came out of deep insecurity, fear, and anxiety through her Christian faith. The exhibit took her about three weeks to put together and featured a mix of both old and new artworks. One particular piece was a beautiful, detailed dress that was developed from the deconstruction of a t-shirt. She said it took her about a month to construct it.

Her dedication to her art is not only displayed in the work itself, but also in her work ethic. Abigail commutes over an hour to and from her classes and still gives her all. Being so dedicated to her craft, we asked Abigail what inspires her as an artist, and she said her childhood in Ghana plays a large role. Additionally, she said her faith in God plays a large role as well. She says finding a mix between the two is very important to her.

In the future, Abigail is looking to pursue a master's degree in Fine Arts and Fashion Design. She is hoping to land a job in the fashion industry working for a high-end fashion house.

We asked Abigail what she does outside of fashion and art, and she told us that she has a great passion for music and is currently part of a choir. Additionally, she is learning to play the piano, with aspirations of being able to freestyle during a jam session. She told us that she listens to a lot of instrumental music, gospel, and jazz.



Sejahari Saulter-Villegas

Kenwood Academy, 2017

**New York University, Tisch School of the Arts, B.A. Drama,
Anticipated Spring 2022**

Sejahari Saulter-Villegas is a senior at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts majoring in Drama. Upon graduation, he plans to move to London and begin his Marshall Scholarship while pursuing two master's degrees.

A native of West Humboldt Park and Kenwood Academy alum, Sejahari has used his Chicago upbringing to inspire his artistic journey at NYU. In addition to creating space for Black and Brown students to “get free and express themselves through the arts,” Sejahari has written, acted in and directed plays during his time at NYU. His latest work titled “Pretty Boy,” serves as his thesis project which will answer questions about perfectionism in Black people and the sensationalism of Black death. “Pretty Boy” is a film that intertwines Sejahari's love of fashion with his Blackness. The story follows a young man who moves to New York City in hopes of becoming a famous writer. Struggling financially, he quickly finds that his face and body can provide a lifestyle for him that his words cannot, and so he decides to pursue modeling. In his modeling career, the main character encounters colorism, sexual harassment, and unfair compensation. Sejahari is excited to bring his vision to life as this is the first time he will be acting and directing in a body of work that he has written himself.

In addition to his educational pursuits, Sejahari will continue working on his own clothing line God of Gold, inspired by his daughter Zanairo.

We asked Sejahari what he has learned from his experiences at NYU. “To create art through struggle,” he said. “Artists in educational institutions will grow through their relationships with other artists and the injustices they endure and fight against through their work.”



Patrick Bogusz

Taft High School, 2018

DePaul University, B.A. Psychology, anticipated graduation, spring 2022

A Taft High School alumnus and Dunning neighborhood native, Patrick is currently a rising senior at DePaul University where he studies psychology with a concentration in human services.

At DePaul, Patrick is a McNair Scholar, a program designed to help DePaul students develop their knowledge and foster the commitment needed to pursue doctoral studies and a career of university-level teaching and research. McNair Scholars participate in faculty mentoring and network building with professors helping them to prepare for their time studying abroad and conducting research.

For the past two years Patrick has been volunteering at Joplin Elementary School on the South Side of Chicago through a foundation named The Cities Mentor Project. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the research program dedicated to helping Chicago Public Schools' students in underserved communities. As a mentor, Patrick works one-on-one with students tutoring them in subjects they may struggle in.

Although tutoring is a large part of the work, an emphasis is also placed on the mental health of students. Sharing circles and journaling are just a few of the activities students participate in through the mentorship program; others provide avenues for fun such as skating, marathons, and other interests students may have.

Patrick told us that his experience volunteering with the Cities Mentor Project has only reinforced his belief that there is work to be done regarding Chicago's problem with education inequality in the public school system. "Working with the Cities Mentor Project has taught me to have an open heart and mind when connecting with children," he said. "Kids don't filter what they have to say. They speak from their heart, and their opinions, perspectives, and ideas should be honored and respected."

Post-graduation, Patrick is looking forward to applying to doctorate programs in psychology. Long-term, he hopes to become a psychologist and open a healing center where people will be able to realign with their purpose and passion for life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Marilyn Appleson

Alexandra Halla Barazzone

Warren Batts

Norma Berfield

John Bitner

Laura Bordine

Harry Brown

John Chamberlain

Tom Clark, Navistar

Stuart Duhl

Pedro Gamboa

Paul Grasmehr, Pritzker Military Museum

Jay Halla

Peter Halla

Richard Helmholtz

Michael Levin

Pauline Halla Mitchell

Pritzker Military Museum

Edith Phelan

Richard Ross

Chuck Schroeder

Robert Wise



In 2022, we are honored to celebrate four milestones for the Wentcher Foundation and its scholars.

- Launching our 21st class of Wentcher Scholars.
- Reaching \$20 Million of scholarship funding.
- Awarding the 1,000th Wentcher scholarship.
- Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the incorporation of the Wentcher Foundation.

Milestones, the Gift of a Lifetime
www.yourmilestones.net

Book Design: A Life in Print, Montclair, NJ
www.alifeinprint.com



***HIGH CHARACTER. BOLD DREAMS.
UNLIMITED IMPACT.***

***Wentcher Foundation is the scholarship
organization that creates equitable opportunities
for high-achieving Chicago-area students to
earn a college degree and go on to positively
impact their communities.***