

Randy Fortener '75

Diversified Investments



At the helm of a firm characterized by its skill in wise investing, Randolph J. Fortner also sees community service as a vital commodity.



Story by Suzanne Wilcox English

Fortener found his career path through an inspiring faculty member at The University of Findlay, and now he hopes to mentor young men to find their way as well.

Fortener, a 1975 graduate who serves as president of Crane Investment Co. in Columbus, came to then-Findlay College to play basketball for Coach Jim Houdeshell, and planned to become a history teacher.

But then Fortener — who goes by his nickname of Randy — took an accounting class from Kenneth Buchenroth, now professor emeritus of business administration.

“He was just a tremendous advocate for the field of accounting,” Fortener said, noting that Buchenroth introduced him to the Big Eight accounting firms of the day. “As soon as I learned more about it, I knew that was what I

wanted to do. He really got me excited and interested — and also equipped. The program was great.”

UF faculty and administrators also worked with Fortener to accommodate a mid-senior year internship with Ernst & Ernst, at a time when internships were less common than they are now. “They kind of crafted that for me — they were extremely helpful, very flexible.”

He encouraged current Findlay students to connect with faculty and others with real-life experience and to explore the different opportunities available in their chosen fields – for instance, in accounting, to examine public accounting, private accounting, governmental accounting — to find one that appeals to them. “They should take the time to dissect their career options.”

Fortener spent three years with Ernst & Ernst, then was hired by a competitor, Deloitte, where he served as a member of the firm’s acquisitions team, first in Dayton — where he also received an MBA from the University of Dayton and completed his certification as a public accountant — and then in New York. He was made a partner in 1985, and then transferred to Columbus, where Crane Plastics, a family business that was among his clients, began pursuing him to join the company, which he did in 1990.

As president of Crane Investment Co., he finds it exciting and rewarding to develop partnerships with firms in related fields. “Our approach has been to look for businesses that have a track record and are profitable, but the owner would like to look at an exit plan or wants to diversify ... we look for businesses where we understand the process of what they do,” he explained, adding that Crane has developed partnerships not only in Columbus but also Cincinnati, Nashville and elsewhere.

And Crane believes in investing in the community in more ways than one. The company’s Web site notes: “We are driven by a passion to give back. ... Crane Group has always believed that business has a responsibility to support non-profit efforts that enhance quality

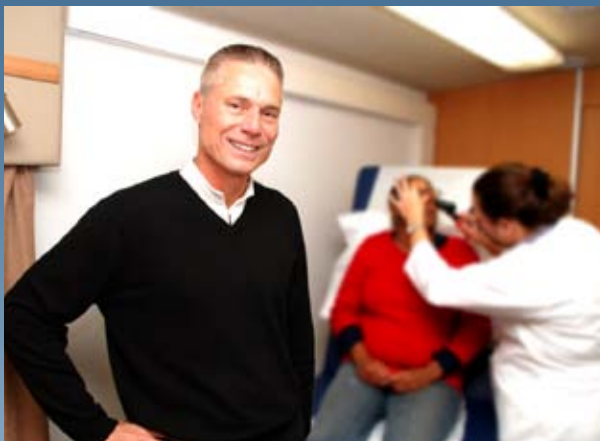
of life in our communities. Through the donation of time, leadership and funding, we’ve been proud to assist groups dedicated to the arts, education, civic affairs, and health and human services.”

As executive vice president of Crane Group, Fortener meets regularly with family members, and “philanthropy is always a part of those discussions. I work with all the businesses that we’ve invested in over the years, and we work with them to develop, for example, a United Way campaign if they don’t have one.”

“It’s a very, very unique company to work for,” Fortener said, noting that giving back is “embedded throughout the corporation,” with executives sitting on 65 different not-for-profit boards throughout central Ohio. “It’s remained a family business, third generation now, and their intention is to keep it a family business and keep these ideals going.”

Fortener himself serves on the boards of directors of The Breathing Association, which assists children with breathing problems, a personal cause for him, and the Columbus Metropolitan Library, which was recently named the No. 1 library system in the country.

In addition, he is among the 80 members of the firm who are involved with a mentoring program for middle school children, providing direction for the young people that continues through their high school careers. “I’ve just developed a really good relationship with my mentee,” who is a high school freshman this year. “This helps us understand what these students have to deal with on a daily basis. It’s very, very rewarding,” he said.



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The Breathing Association, one of Fortener’s favorite causes, launched this new Mobile Lung Health Clinic last fall. The mobile medical unit, equipped with two exam rooms, a portable chest X-ray machine and a small lab, provides comprehensive lung health care services, including education on how to deal with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), to low-income people in central Ohio.