

The Legacy of Bud Latz

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G. Irving Latz II, known to his many friends as Bud, was born in 1920 here in Fort Wayne and after a long and happy life of 88 years, died here in the Hospice Home on February 20, 2008.

He was active in Arts United, the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Fort Wayne Futures, the Fort Wayne National Bank, the Tomusk Foundation, and the Quest Club among others as his obituary says, but that only tells part of the story.

He was the last person of his generation in his family. His parents, G. Irving and Carrie Steifel Latz, his beloved wife, Janet, his sister, Jane Neiman, and brother, William had all preceded him in death. His two children, Gil Latz, PhD at Ohio State University, and Sara Latz MD in California also survive him along with several grandchildren and nieces and nephews. Those important facts tell part of the story as well.

Witty, warm, and humble, Bud was self-effacing to a fault, reports his son Gil. He tells that the Philharmonic recognized Bud publicly towards the end of his life and he was embarrassed. Gil says he hated it. Bud was more than generous to his friends. I once spent time with him at a wedding of a friend's daughter. He made the trip to Washington DC alone and joined in the festivities throughout the weekend even though at that time in his life he was significantly handicapped and had real trouble getting around. Still with a smile on his face he cared to come for his friend.

Bud is well known as one of the several downtown merchants of the early part of the 20th century in Fort Wayne. Along with Stan and Marvin Fishman who owned Fishman's Women's Apparel, the Frank Brothers, Jack and Theodore, of Frank's Department Store, Ralph Schwartz of Schwartz's Baby Land, Lou Margolis owner of Stillman's Department Store, Myron Goldberg of The Boston Store, Robert Hutner president of Hutner's Paris women's ready-to-wear, and Nobbson's Art Shaffer among others, the Latz family of Wolf and Dessauer made downtown Fort Wayne a shopping destination for northeast Indiana and truly for the entire tri-state area.

There is nothing more iconic of downtown Fort Wayne to residents of a certain age than the Wolf and Dessauer window displays of the last century. And

especially after Santa and his reindeer made their appearance in 1940, the Christmas season in Fort Wayne was officially begun when the Wolf and Dessauer Christmas lights went on. By the way, the Santa sign which we are still fortunate to see on the north side of the downtown National City Bank building each year was built by the Latzs at a fever pace in three months and in 1940 when it went up on the Wolf and Dessauer building, it was the largest electric light bulb sign in the country. Bud Latz often remarked that they got a lot of teasing because Santa Claus was going the wrong way on Washington Street!

Opened in 1896 by Sam Wolf and Myron Dessauer, Wolf and Dessauer was a dry goods store that under the management of the two young entrepreneurs grew from a 12,000 square foot building on Calhoun Street in 1896 to a four-story, 54,000 square foot department store in 1908 that was titled the largest retail store in the state of Indiana. Sam Wolf and Myron Dessauer took frequent trips to New York to get the latest in goods and fashion, and from the very beginning emphasized customer service as one of their most important objectives.

By 1917, only nine years later the store had again outgrown its building and Wolf and Dessauer built a huge six-story building at Calhoun and Washington with many departments, modern amenities such as escalators and ladies lounge rooms, and fine dining, sophistication not seen in Fort Wayne before. W&D, as it was called, became the hub of downtown, and the legend it is today truly began. Early in the '20s W&D incorporated and Sam Wolf and Myron Dessauer who got into some debt troubles began to sell some of their interest in the store to a group of local businessmen including, Bud's uncle Samuel Smith, and his father G. Irving Latz. They borrowed \$400,000, bought the store, and the name Latz became intertwined with Wolf and Dessauer for several decades to come.

Under G. Irving Latz' leadership the store continued to expand and by 1920 it was considered one of the foremost stores in the country. G. Irving had a genius for retail, especially ladies ready-to-wear. He came up with what he called the basis for relationship with his costumers and with the community according to a memo to his employees:

*"To build a store that will be a credit to the community it serves

*To foster a fine relationship between the store, its customers, co-workers and suppliers

*To maintain quality and always sell merchandise at a fair price

*To consider no transaction closed until the article purchased has rendered satisfaction

*To measure success only by the services which it is able to render to its customers.” (Wolf and Dessauer, Where Fort Wayne Shopped)

W&D continued to prosper under G. Irving Latz who was much admired by the people who worked for him and by his business associates. According to both of his sons he gave his best and expected everyone around him to give their best too. He was one of those guys, reports Bud and his brother Bill, who could get the most out of everyone he was dealing with. He inspired loyalty, trust and respect and a good modicum of intimidation. He was not an easy man at work and certainly not an easy man at home. The Latz sons said that every vacation was spent at the store. It's what we did. And we called him Mr. Latz and did menial jobs for many years. He expected his sons to go into the retail business from the bottom up as he had and there was little choice about the issue.

Latz senior cared deeply about Fort Wayne as well, and one of his most important accomplishments was financially backing Frank Lyman and the group that brought the Fort Wayne Philharmonic to Fort Wayne in 1944, just over seventy-five years ago. He didn't like the music very much, but he was in the audience on opening night and often thereafter because he thought a city like Fort Wayne would benefit by having a fine orchestra. His efforts were influential to both the community and to his sons.

G. Irving died surprisingly in 1947 at the young age of 58, and on his death, he left the management of the store to his sons, G. Irving II and William Latz. Bud was named president of Wolf and Dessauer, a position he held for the next two decades. In the Entrepreneurial History Collection at the Allen County Public Library, both sons have said in an interview with Reid Chapman that they carried on as closely as possible in the style of their father. Customer service at W&D continued to be legendary. Bud and his brother Bill chuckled when they talked about what it meant to them that the customer is always right. “We took back anything, no questions asked. Sometimes it had been worn, used, or wasn't even bought from our store!” Bud tells about one woman who bought a pair of shoes for her baby and in about six months brought them back because they were too

small. We replaced them with a bigger pair. She did that several more times and always W&D replaced the shoes with a bigger pair. She only paid for the first pair of shoes. That's what it means that the customer is always right," laughed Bud. (Interview with Reid Chapman)

Bud had graduated from Central High School in 1937, the University of Pennsylvania in 1941 with a degree in Economics and was a captain in the US Army during WWII. The rest of his education came thirty-one years later in 1972 when Bud earned an MBA from the University of Chicago, no small feat.

After the war Bud come back to Fort Wayne, a single man, looking, along with hundreds of others, to resume his life, to meet a woman, to marry and to have a family. Close friends of Bud, Leonard and Rikki Goldstein, who had gone to Ohio State University before the war, invited Bud to come with them to visit Columbus to meet a friend, Janet, whose husband had been killed in WWII. It was quite a visit. Bud was smitten. It was love at first sight and Bud determined to bring Janet back to Fort Wayne. According to a wonderful interview I had with Rikki Goldstein, friend of many here at Quest Club and life-long friend of the Latzs, Bud had quite a bit of trouble entreating Janet to move to Fort Wayne. But he persevered.

They were a wonderful couple. Bud, with his fine sense of humor, had a fabulous, witty personality. Always interested in music and the arts, Janet was a talented pianist and always an active leader in promoting the arts in Fort Wayne. She was a huge influence on her husband, who had not been particularly interested in music. But she brought him along. Son Gil Latz, said, "Dad adored her."

As a teenager, Bud grew up in the house which is now the clubhouse at Sycamore Hills Country Club. He often told Larry Adelman that he and his father planted the beautiful double row of sycamore trees along the main driveway and the 17th fairway in 1937. He also talked about the small dining room in the basement called the Canal Room, named because the wood paneling in the room came from wood along the Erie Canal. Later Bud and Janet Latz lived in the house at the corner of Randall, Taylor and North Washington where Tom and Judy Hayhurst currently live. Their neighbor and friend of mine, Laurie Hollars, remembers when she was growing up nearby, tagging along after the Latz children and her brother, playing in each other's houses, enjoying the warm and loving company of

the Latz family. Later Bud and Janet built a beautiful contemporary house with large glass walls back in the woods on Hadley Road, unfortunately, just before Interstate 69 was built. I was in that house many years ago and saw a beautiful harpsichord. I complimented it and got mysterious smiles. When I mentioned it to Gil Latz, he laughed and said Bud had built it for Janet from a kit over the course of many years, maybe ten years. It appears to be a bit of a family rib-tickler.

Business at Wolf and Dessauer was extremely successful through the 50's and into the 60's. The store had nearly everything including an automotive department, a garden department, a credit union, its own inhouse infirmary with a nurse, a pet department with some exotics, live models, a personal shopper called Amy Lee, for those who didn't want to select their own clothing, its own orchestra, and, as many of the women in town know, a beauty salon where so many of the hairdressers in Fort Wayne got their start. There were several dining rooms, sometimes restricted to men only. Quester Mick McCollum was eating lunch at W&D on one men-only day when four consequential matrons of Fort Wayne confidently swept in and sat down in-the-midst of the boys only room. As Mick says, W&D's dining room was liberated! Afterwards Wolf and Dessauer dining was co-ed.

Bud had strong sense of fairness and a commitment to equality. During the years when he was president of W&D he integrated the work force by hiring men and women of color to wait on customers – a first in the city. Afterwards other stores followed their lead. The Latz family had always lived according to their convictions. Many years earlier G. Irving had canceled his advertising contract with the local newspapers for a time because they had invited Charles Lindberg to come to Fort Wayne and Latz considered him a Nazi sympathizer.

On February 10, 1962, billowing clouds of smoke rose from downtown Fort Wayne, blocking the sun, clogging traffic, even confusing the Fort Wayne Fire Department for a time. The blocks on Washington east of Calhoun were ablaze in what was to be called the worst fire in Fort Wayne's history. Because the fire doors between the buildings failed to close properly, the fire spread quickly through the entire Wolf and Dessauer complex. All three buildings of W&D were soon burning furiously. One hundred police officers were mobilized, 125 Marine

Reservists, the Sheriff's Auxiliary and Civil Defense workers were called out. Nearby stores including Fishman's on Calhoun Street were evacuated. Fire fighters fought the blaze for hours, but Wolf and Dessauer was completely gutted.

The fire was a tough blow for everyone involved. The Latz family determined to rebuild. Fighting the trend to move into a shopping mall in the suburbs, committed as they were to the center of Fort Wayne, W&D rebuilt downtown. But soon the writing was on the wall; mid-city shopping was in decline. Wolf and Dessauer was sold first to City Stores and then to L.S. Ayres which finally was forced to give way to the demise of downtown shopping. Bud Latz stayed during the Ayres years but retired in 1966 to pursue other opportunities. He ran an agri-technology business called Sci Agra for 14 years. Sci Agra was an egg sorting business.

According to several who were interviewed, Bud Latz was groomed by his father to be a merchant, to take over the store, and to live the life his father thought best for him. Truth be told he was interested in a wider range of undertakings than his father credited to him. Fortunately for Fort Wayne Bud loved architecture and the importance of a range of fine arts in the community. Both Bud and Janet Latz felt they had an obligation to make a difference in the community where they lived. They felt it is one's responsibility to help make his home a better place. One person I interviewed described a conversation he had with Bud and Janet. This man had been asked to do a difficult volunteer job and he was telling the Latzs he was thinking about not accepting the position. They protested vehemently. "You must do it! You must take it, try your best, learn about it and take the job! It is our duty to respond to these community needs."

It was the great fortune of Fort Wayne in 1955 when the Fine Arts Foundation was created by a "group of thoughtful citizens who believed the arts are important to the people of a city which has a cultural heritage well-known to other communities across the nation and to performing artists everywhere." (Fine Arts Foundation early brochure) With these lofty words, the Fine Arts Foundation was formed. On the list of directors were many recognizable names including John Shoaff, Bud Latz, Sam Rea, Helene Foellinger, James Barrett, Paul Shaffer, James Anglin, Robert Goldstine, Mrs. Marvin Fishman, Donnelly P. McDonald, Al Kettler, and several more. One fundraising pamphlet early in Fine

Arts Foundation history said, “your gift is a measure of your dedication to and belief in the value to Fort Wayne of its cultural life.” Such high-minded quotes help us understand the passion of those earlier Fort Wayne enthusiasts.

The idea was to bring a collective focus and financial support to the creative sector of Fort Wayne. According to Sue Mendenhall, President of Arts United of Fort Wayne and Arts United historian, Miriam Morgan, the founders of the Fine Arts Foundation knew that the arts equip our city to attract and retain the talented workforce needed to elevate the prosperity of the entire community. In fact, the mission of Arts United still says that today. The name of the Fine Arts Foundation was changed to Arts United of Fort Wayne some years ago.

In the late 50’s the Fine Arts Foundation defined the needs of its member organizations. As a result, they decided to raise money to build an arts campus in-the-midst of downtown Fort Wayne. The arts campus was to become a destination. It would be a place to go again and again, the heart of the arts in Fort Wayne. The project was huge. No other city in the United States had ever done anything like it except New York City with its Lincoln Center, which was in the process of being built at the time and the Woodruff Arts Center in Atlanta which was only in discussion stages but not yet started. Fort Wayne’s art enthusiasts were incredibly gutsy!

A committee to find an architect for the project was appointed. Bud Latz, an integral part of the Fine Arts Foundation group and always a devotee of architecture, was named chairman of a committee including Betty Fishman, Donnelly P. McDonald, T. Richard Shoaff, Lester Grile, Maxine Jacobs, Bertha Duemling, Sam Rea, Mrs. E.H. Kilbourne, Mrs. John Cooper, Robert Tolan, Joan McNagny, and Helene Foellinger. According to the chapter on the arts written by Anita Cast, in A History of Fort Wayne and Allen County, Magnavox loaned their airplane to the group and the members flew around the country meeting with leading architects of the day, looking at their work. One of the best stories told by Bud Latz and others is about the architect Mies van der Rohe who visited Fort Wayne to interview for the job. During the meeting at the old art museum, Van der Rohe grew agitated, stamped his cane on the floor and roared that as a great architect he didn’t need to answer any of their stupid questions!

Bud contacted famous architect Philip Johnson whom he had long admired, but Johnson was already very busy and suggested Bud call Louis Kahn. Louis Kahn, who was based in Philadelphia, and Bud became quite friendly. Eventually after considerable encouragement and discussion of the arts campus project in Fort Wayne, Bud was able to convince Kahn to consider the job. Finally, in January 1961 the world-renowned Kahn was hired to design the proposed arts campus in Fort Wayne. Kahn devised a plan for a huge multi-building complex that would stretch from Clinton to Lafayette Streets and from Main Street north to the railroad. His vision of the arts campus was to include a Philharmonic Hall seating 2500, a School of Music and Dance, an Historical Museum, a Fine Arts School, a Civic Theater, an outdoor Greek Theater, and a Theater of Living Arts called the Performing Arts Center plus an administrative building. The cost was estimated by Kahn to be approximately \$24,000,000 and that was in the 60's!

The Fine Arts Foundation Directors gasped at the cost of the project. Louis Kahn asked what they were thinking in the way of money, and they told him perhaps \$2,000,000. So the plan was pared down and the fund-raising began. There were three capital campaigns which remarkably raised a total of \$4.5 million dollars. In 1970 ground was broken and at last in September of 1973 the Performing Arts Center was opened with a full week celebration. Louis Kahn was here several times during construction and at the opening.

The PAC was the only arts center Kahn ever designed. A mid-sized theater, now called the Arts United Center, it had 650 seats, a proscenium that can accommodate a sixty-foot opening, important for an orchestra, spectacular acoustics enabling speakers to speak without amplification, good sized dressing rooms, and a striking design. To be sure, it was not Kahn's first suggested design which was a sort of bow to an indoor-outdoor Greek Theatre. Architecturally interestingly now, it is a building within a building. When it was designed there was literally no thought towards accessibility, therefore there exist no elevators for public use, and without doubt by now, nearly 50 years later, the technology is far out of date.

Extraordinarily, the vision of the early group of Fine Arts Foundation directors has largely been accomplished in downtown Fort Wayne. The Fort Wayne Museum of Art was opened in 1984, the Civic Theater uses the Arts United building, the

Embassy was saved and became home to the Fort Wayne Philharmonic in the '70s, the History Center is nearby, the Auer Center for Arts and Culture, Parkview Physicians Group ArtLab, Hall Community Art Center and the Alexander T. Rankin House all have become arts venues largely as extensions of the efforts begun by Bud Latz and his fellows on the original Fine Arts Foundation. Arts United has raised in-the-neighborhood of \$50,000,000 for member organizations through the years. One telling quote by Robert Colby Nelson is this from Anita Cast's arts chapter in A History of Fort Wayne and Allen County, "Evidences of Fort Wayne's romance with culture, suffice it to say that here amid corn, soybeans, hogs, there rises a pinnacle of community attention to the arts the likes of it are dreamed about in many communities but rarely materialize."

The records of the Achduth Vescholom Congregation list the names of the Latz family from early in the 20th century. G. Irving Latz, Bud's father, was featured prominently in a book of early leaders of the Temple and the family supported Temple activities through the years, but Bud did not celebrate his bar mitzvah as a young man. Later in life Bud became a more spiritual person interested in Judaism and eager to participate in the life of the Achduth Vescholom Congregation. He decided to study for his bar mitzvah, even at age seventy. He immersed himself in an in-depth, rigorous study of the literature. He studied Hebrew, not easy for a man of his age. He learned to chant the blessings as well as selected passages from the sacred books, and he prepared a speech all under the tutelage of the Rabbi Richard B. Safran. After a solemn, moving religious service, there was an elegant and joyful celebration for Bud's family and his many guests including some people here in this room. Bud had a keen sense of Jewish responsibility and became very active in the congregation. He was dedicated to raising funds for the Jewish Foundation and he set up a fund at the Community Foundation for their benefit. He chaired the Temple's Endowment Committee and he and Janet were both active in the Jewish Federation. He can be seen in the collage in the Social Hall of Achduth Vesholom made to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Congregation in 1990.

In closing I can truly say after talking to many people who knew Bud Latz, I never heard a negative word. He was a warm upbeat man, rarely down, an avid supporter of his family, his friends, his hometown, and his religious community. He was a sweet-tempered man with a wry sense of humor. He was kind. His life can be a model for each of us. The legacy of Bud Latz.

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