



Richard J. Bolte, Sr.

1934-2006

Logistics Pioneer

The early years

Richard (Dick) J. Bolte, Sr., the late founder, chairman and chief executive officer of BDP International, was born and raised in a working-class Irish Catholic neighborhood in Northeast Philadelphia. As the goaltender for his high school soccer team, he controlled the players' positions and tempo of the game, exhibiting early signs of the leadership that would make him a success in life. Off the field, he was a nice, sociable fellow, according to a former team mate, but on the field he was all business, as evidenced by the fact he had only one goal scored against him in an entire season.

Upon graduation, Dick entered the military, serving in Alaska during the Korean conflict. Return to civilian life brought with it a whirlwind of activity, including marriage, starting a family, and night classes at LaSalle University, where he eventually earned a degree in business administration. While at LaSalle, Dick became interested in industrial relations and intended to pursue a career in labor negotiations. However, a difference of opinion with the owner of a large bakery cost him his human resources job, and he went to work for Morris Friedman & Co., a small freight forwarder. He fell in love with the business and never looked back. He subsequently founded his own logistics firm, R.J. Bolte Company, with a \$1,200 home improvement loan and a Royal manual typewriter. Dick regularly worked 18-hour days, arriving at his office at 8:00 a.m. and often not leaving until 2:00 a.m. the following day. When he was out of the office, he would put his phone lines on hold to give the impression he was busy, not that he had to. One associate recalls he would think nothing of working all day, driving several hours for dinner with a customer or prospect, and returning to his office for closings.

In 1968 Dick's first wife passed away, leaving him with four young sons and a torrid work schedule. The survival of the business hinged on his intense drive and a small but loyal group of employees. Four years later, he merged with two local competitors, Donahue and Person, to form BDP International.

The birth of BDP

Through the 1970s, BDP remained a local operation with just two offices, both in Philadelphia. Competition was keen, not only from other freight forwarders, but from alternative ports such as New York and Baltimore.

The company landed DuPont as a customer in 1973, the first step toward becoming a significant factor in chemical industry logistics. Dick recognized the future of his fledgling company would depend upon his ability to differentiate himself from larger competitors. His love of the business and his customers, combined with a dogged determination to succeed, demanded excruciating attention to detail, accuracy and consistency.

A former DuPont customer notes that BDP was always a dependable business partner, "doing what they said they were going to do, when they said they were going to do it". He characterized Dick as a man of the highest integrity, someone who always brought something of value, whether it was the latest technology or market intelligence. Another customer recalls Dick as an "aggressive innovator" in single-minded pursuit of his goals – opinionated and outspoken, but also extremely honest and loyal.

A business associate and longtime friend who worked with Dick in the early days of electronic data interchange saw him as a visionary, particularly with respect to computers. Dick was an early adopter of information technology for organizing and managing international freight movements and other aspects of global shippers' supply chains. Under his tutelage, BDP pioneered numerous firsts in logistics IT, including electronic transmission of data to U.S. Customs under the automated broker interface program, as well as export declaration information to the U.S. Bureau of Census. In addition, the company was the first logistics firm to map EDI standards for the international documentation process and to establish links to ocean and air carriers for bills of lading and bookings.

As the 1980s drew to a close, many of BDP's smaller competitors failed, and a wave of consolidation that continues

to the present day overtook the industry. Dick's partners retired and he purchased their interests, assuming sole ownership of the company, which had expanded to six offices along the East Coast. The first seeds of globalization were being sown as customers began migrating to Asia, the Pacific Rim and Latin America, and Dick realized he had to follow or be left behind.

Building a global enterprise

The dynamics of the logistics industry called for continuing technological innovation and a global footprint. An acquaintance, who had been interviewing him for an oral history of BDP, recalls how Dick would preface many of his recollections with "and then the vision changed." The vision changed a number of times in the course of his career; he often anticipated the changes and always accommodated them. A customer and friend notes when Dick saw things happening, he was quick to respond with workable solutions. A former joint venture partner watched him grow with his key customers, noting he was still doing business with them even after their own companies had undergone sweeping change.

The 1990s saw BDP advance technologically and expand globally. The decade opened with the company being the first logistics provider to receive and transmit commercial invoices in EDIFACT format to U.S. Customs. It was also the first import logistics firm to participate in the automated invoice interface program.

In 1994 BDP established its global network to provide greater control of the processes and information within customers' supply chains. To assure his customers received the same level and quality of service throughout the world, Dick sought relationships with other logistics firms that aligned with BDP operationally and culturally – companies with solid reputations, strong infrastructures and deep market knowledge, together with compatible long-term goals.

The milestones and accolades continued through the 1990s as BDP became the first logistics company to enter into a cooperative alliance with SAP resulting in Exportise software

and was among the first to be certified for remote location filing. The company also was recognized for its leadership in implementing the automated export system, and received the President's Award for Excellence in Exporting in 1997.

As BDP entered the 21st Century, Dick and his management team – seven sons he had been grooming to take over one day – once again had to refocus their vision.

The future, they realized, would require even greater investment in technology, as well as standardization of logistics processes to streamline customers' supply chains and reduce costs. To meet these demands, BDP invested heavily in Xpedion, a web-based operating and IT platform for managing all international shipments in one environment. In addition, the company expanded beyond transaction-based relationships, forming its Centrx consulting unit to design, develop, deploy and manage global supply chain solutions.

After September 11, 2001, terrorism threatened to disrupt the flow of international trade, prompting Dick and BDP to become a Responsible Care® Partner of the American Chemistry Council and a charter member of the U.S. Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism.

Although BDP's corporate offices are just a block away from Dick's original office at 5th and Chestnut Streets in Philadelphia, the company he leaves behind is a truly global enterprise, employing 2,000 people in a network comprising more than 20 operations throughout North America, plus wholly owned subsidiaries, joint ventures and strategic partnerships in 113 countries. It continues to serve five of the world's 10 largest chemical companies, and consistent with Dick's vision, it remains a family affair.

Philanthropist, sportsman, connoisseur

Those fortunate enough to have known Dick agree he was an extremely generous person. A business associate captured the essence of the man, describing him as "tough as nails, but a heart of gold." A former customer and friend said, "If you were in trouble, you could always count on Dick for help."

His largesse extended to Mount St. Mary's University, where he served as a trustee and established a scholarship in memory of his grandson Ryan. Another recipient of his generosity was the Seamen's Church Institute of Philadelphia, on whose board he also served for many years. In addition, Dick was known to offer employment to friends who had fallen on hard times.

Notwithstanding the demands of business, he found the time to pursue other interests as well, and he pursued them passionately. Dick loved horses, and while vacationing in Aruba he saw one he recognized on the tee shirt of the person who would become his partner in a harness racing venture. Dick engaged him in conversation and they became fast friends, jointly owning hundreds of pacers and taking numerous vacations together over a period of some 30 years.

One of Dick's trainers noted he was very competitive and even though he knew he could make money with mediocre horses, he wanted only the best. He loved to visit horse farms to assess the stock before the annual yearling auction in Harrisburg, Pa. His trainer found Dick to be very personable, interesting to talk to and never in a hurry – "The horses were a good break for him."

Dick brought to the Pennsylvania State Harness Racing Commission, on which he served for several years, "a vast, deep knowledge of the standard-bred industry," according to a fellow commissioner. His concern for the common man, the \$2 bettor, prompted him to take on the doping issue and what the industry could do to resolve it.

His colleague on the Commission characterized Dick as "the consummate professional, the consummate gentleman...a definite asset to the Commission, his family and indeed, life."

Dick also developed a consuming interest in art, sparked by his second wife Pat, who is an artist herself. As with the other aspects of his life, it became a passion and he studied voraciously. Having purchased his first work by a renowned American artist in 1976, he went on to amass one of largest collections in the country. As with his pacers, Dick was always confident and decisive in his selections, according to the artist's

representative. "Art was the tender, sensitive side of Dick," she explains. "He would lose himself in the paintings, seeing things in them that even I didn't see."

A life well lived

The love of one's family and friends, the respect of one's business associates, the gratitude of the community. These are the hallmarks of a life well lived. In addition to a highly successful company, Dick Bolte left these as his legacy. Among the most cherished of the many honors bestowed upon him was an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Mount St. Mary's University.

Just months before his death, Dick received the Chemical Heritage Foundation's first Award for Supporting Industries. In presenting the award, Foundation President Dr. Arnold Thackray said, "Dick Bolte is a courageous and visionary leader, who has pioneered in the development of international logistics services and complementing information systems, and thereby has enabled the global expansion of containerized chemical shipments. He is a true entrepreneur, creating value to the benefit of all."

The following are typical recollections of those who knew Dick: "Our conversations always turned to our children.".... "He left a lot of good memories and not everyone does that".... "He was a very charitable person".... "He was loyal beyond belief".... "He was a great guy, great friend, one of a kind".... "Dick was an exemplary figure, an incarnation of the central virtues of the American dream. He was also a person of deep faith and the courage of his belief."

His life is perhaps best summed up in the eulogy delivered by a family member at his funeral service, "All who he touched became part of his family. At times, he struggled to be happy, but certainly brought happiness to others. His quiet acts of generosity benefited institutions and people alike. He taught us to dream. He challenged us to dream big. He dared to have a bold vision for the industry, his company and his family."