

THE TWO RIVER TIMES™

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THE WEEK OF JANUARY 24 - 31, 2014

# Morgan Cline:

## *A Prescription for a Happy Life*

Morgan E. Cline is in the midst of a life well lived.

The Middletown resident grew up poor, worked hard – initially as a pharmacist – then became an advertising account executive and founded what is now the largest pharmaceutical advertising agency in the world. Now in his retirement he has found joy in helping others through his philanthropic endeavors.

It’s been a life that makes Cline smile when he reflects on what he has accomplished and grateful and pleased that he has been able to make life a bit better in the Iowa county where he was raised and in the Two River area.

During the past few years, he has raised and donated money to build health care facilities; restored a number of vintage buildings in and around his native Exline, Iowa, that have enhanced the area’s economy and the lives of residents; and even now is restoring the gardens and home on an estate just down the road from his Navesink River Road home.

The elegant mansions he has restored are a far cry from what he knew as a child.

“I grew up on a small farm in southern Iowa,” Cline said. “It was a time in the ‘40s when the southern Iowa farmers were poor. My father was quite poor. He was a coal miner in the winter and a farmer in the summer. We patched together a small amount of hay and grain and a few pigs and some cows we milked. It was an ugly life. We didn’t have electricity in the house or toilets until I was out of college.”

He looked for a way to escape that life and as a youngster, began working for the pharmacist in Centerville, the Appanoose County seat. He worked Saturdays and then summers. “That blossomed into an interest in pharmacy as I watched the pharmacist. I got a scholarship to Drake University, and off I went,” he said.

Always a good student – he was the top student in his high school of seven – he also finished high in his class at Drake in Des Moines. He then went into the Army and ended up as the post pharmacist at Fort Dix and then Fort Jay on Governor’s Island in New York Harbor. After the army, he worked at a pharmacy in Jersey City but became disenchanted with the profession.

About that time, he saw a newspaper ad seeking an account executive for an advertising agency in Manhattan. “I had no idea what that was. I went on a blind interview and confessed that I knew nothing about accounting,” he said with a laugh.

The interviewer explained that the position was actually public relations – but he got the job at Dean L. Burdick Associates, followed by one at Robert A. Becker, Inc., and then in 1967 at Klemtner Advertising.

“I love it. I just love it, loved it, loved it,” he emphasized.

His timing – and skills set – were pitch perfect. “I was one of the only pharmacists, probably, in the industry so it wasn’t hard to climb and claw your way to the top. In 16 years, I was president of the company.”

He understood the products, the science behind them, their purpose, potential, interactions and the image his clients wanted to project. He was able to meld his body of knowledge with his innate sense of creativity.

Over the years, he worked with a number of high-profile clients but he “nurtured” the Pfizer account. He was responsible for the successful advertising campaigns that made such blockbuster medications as Lipitor, Zithromax, Unisom, Ben-Gay and Viagra household names.

In 1984, Cline and two partners formed Cline, Davis and Mann, Inc., and the Pfizer account transferred to the new firm. “As Pfizer grew to become the largest pharmaceutical firm in the world, we grew along with it,” Cline said. “Today, we are the largest pharmaceutical agency in the world.”

The job was six days a week from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. and sometimes even later. That fit well with Cline’s work ethic, drive and his love of his career.

The partners sold their firm in 1996 to Omnicom, a communications, advertising and marketing conglomerate; Cline retired in 1998.

While Cline speaks with great fondness about his advertising career, it is matched by his appreciation for – and pride in – what he has been able to do for others through his philanthropic pursuits.

Cline’s good works have stretched from Drake University where he built the Morgan E. Cline School of Pharmacy and Science building and then an adjoining large glass atrium to the installation of a memorial in his hometown to honor those who died in the nation’s wars. He has given money and been involved in the construction of buildings at the junior college where he, his brother and sister attended classes. He opened a dialysis unit in Iowa and donated \$1 million to the region’s hospital.

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In this area, Cline and his late partner of 53 years, Benjamin D’Onofrio, hosted a huge fundraiser, The Cancer Ball for the American Cancer Society, at their estate for about a dozen years. Cline also hosts a Halloween festival on his property to benefit the Visiting Nurse Association. He continues to raise funds for Monmouth Medical Center in Long Branch as the honorary chairman of its capital campaign. It’s where he and D’Onofrio gifted \$3.5 million for the emergency wing now named in their honor.

As Cline, who is 81, looks back on his life’s journey from poor boy to philanthropist, he says, “It’s hard to describe. It fills you up. It fills your heart. It fills your soul. It really does.” His ability to give back to others is something he could never imagine as a child.

Part of the giving back that has given him much pleasure is his work restoring gracious, older homes and historic buildings and construction of new facilities. Cline has restored 11 mansions and buildings near his boyhood home from a one-room schoolhouse that has been turned into a museum to a mansion that is now the home of 60 vendors who sell a variety of products.

As a child, he “always loved to go into Centerville and see the old homes along Drake Avenue where the rich people lived. I always said ‘Someday I’ll have one of these.’ Now I have a lot of them!”

The boy who grew up during the Great Depression has a strong pull to his hometown. He still has family there and goes back each year, usually with a large group of friends, for the town’s Pancake Day. It’s an event, started more than 60 years ago as a thank you from merchants to farmers for their patronage that has now blossomed into a multicounty festival.

The work he does to restore buildings, both in Iowa and New Jersey, is great fun and a challenge for him – “I just love it.” He enjoys nothing better than getting into an older structure with great bones and seeing how it can be revived and what architectural treasures he will find.

He has had a home in the Two River area for more than 30 years, first in Rumson, where he restored a large home on Rumson Road with D’Onofrio, and then his present Navesink River Road home, which he and D’Onofrio also rebuilt, called Riverwind. Many know it as the property with the four cows.

In August, he purchased Riverside, a mansion designed by William Welles Bosworth and built on more than 13 acres in 1904 for the Timalot family.

He bought it because he “wanted something to do,” he said. “It was on the market and no one wanted it and it was about to go under to a developer.”

He is completely restoring the columned mansion – right down to burnishing and reusing its original hardware – and bringing the gardens, which he calls “a botanical wonderland,” back to their former glory. Though he thought about moving to the estate once the work is completed, he decided his present residence is really his home. He expects to sell Riverside when the project comes to fruition by this summer but until then, he’s going to have fun with its rehabilitation.

All in all, Morgan Cline has had a life well lived.

By Michele J. Kuhn



DANNY SANCHEZ