

# E.B. Wilson

## St. Lawrence '53

### Oxford Cup Roll No. 057

It all started with a baseball glove. A 12-year-old E.B. Wilson, *St. Lawrence '53*, had played second base for his sand lot baseball team in Albany, New York. He decided that he wanted to become a first-baseman, but did not have the proper glove. Wilson communicated his desire to his parents over dinner one evening. Their response provided a valuable life-long lesson.

"How do you plan to pay for the glove?" they asked. In the modest household of his youth, Wilson learned the value of hard work. He had a string of lawns he would mow and gardens he would take care of in the neighborhood. "It was a family of values, hard work and no handouts," he recalls.

Harry Reiff, a professor at St. Lawrence in the early 1950s when Wilson studied on the Canton, New York, campus, was the mentor who lit the intellectual fires within the impressionable young man. Reiff was a charismatic, yet tough, educator who further instilled an appreciation for the ethic of discipline and hard work. Regular tutorials would involve heavy discussions on Plato's *Republic* and Plutarch's *Lives*. It was then that the young Eagle Scout learned the value of being an educated citizen and offering one's service to his community. While earning his MBA at Harvard, Wilson earned his keep as a door-to-door salesman, toting Fuller brushes. After his formal education, he served two years in the U.S. Army. But, he says, "the smartest thing I did in those early years was to marry Betsy," his college sweetheart, a marriage that just passed 48 years.

In a professional business career that spanned nearly five decades, Wilson developed a thorough understanding of and appreciation for international business. He started at Vicks Chemical Company (later known as Richardson-Vicks) in New York City and was soon sent to Europe for a time. Then, after three years in the Philippines, he and his wife Betsy moved to Wisconsin where Wilson took over the international marketing director post for Kimberly-Clark Corporation.

By 1965, he became CEO of the company's Japanese subsidiary, where he successfully introduced the Kleenex brand to the Japanese market. That was followed by a stint as CEO of the French subsidiary and later, a turn in Minnesota as CEO of Pillsbury's international operations. His greatest achievement came when, as co-owner and CEO, he resurrected Almay Cosmetics, which was on the verge of going out-of-business. In the process, he secured FDA approval and determined the scientific standards to establish the brand as the first to be known as "hypo-allergenic."

"If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there," muses the 72-year-old Wilson as he offers his definition of strategic planning. During his business career, Wilson had a reputation for being an effective strategist. He has since transferred these strategic skills from the business world to higher education, as an author and facilitator who heads a consulting practice.

While serving as chairman of the board of trustees at his alma mater, Wilson noticed a widening disparity between the values of the host institution and the behavior of members of the Greek community.

In an August 1996 letter to then-editor L.E. (Erv) Johnson, *Idaho '53*, Wilson wrote, "I have witnessed a steady, general decline of campus influence and perceived value of the Greek system not only at St. Lawrence, but on campus after campus across the United States." His letter was shared with leaders of the Fraternity, who promptly invited him to Oxford to discuss what might be done. In 1997, Wilson chaired the Fraternity's strategic planning process, which led to the creation of the *Men of Principle* initiative.

He harkens back to the central mission of the host institution, "Our colleges and universities are dedicated, as they should be, to the education of our young adults and building the intellectual vitality of those undergraduates." As a consultant to the boards of numerous institutions of higher learning, Wilson is confident that administrators recognize Fraternity life as a co-curricular component of being educated, "but it is incumbent upon those Fraternities to earn their role by acting in all ways to support the central mission of the host institution."

"The implementation of *Men of Principle* is a daunting commitment. It takes resolve to stay the course. It requires discipline to make tough decisions. It means allocating resources, human and financial, of historic proportions to design and build programs and initiatives that support and advance *Men of Principle*."

From his early days of playing sand lot baseball through his impressive career as a CEO and strategist, Wilson has remained true to his values. He is willing to work hard to orient his efforts toward the promotion of a values system that is honorable, challenging and demanding, for which there are substantial rewards. Those rewards come in the form of a principled life, where success is found in one's family, business and community.

— Thomas C. Olver, *Central Michigan '98*, editor, *The Beta Theta Pi*