

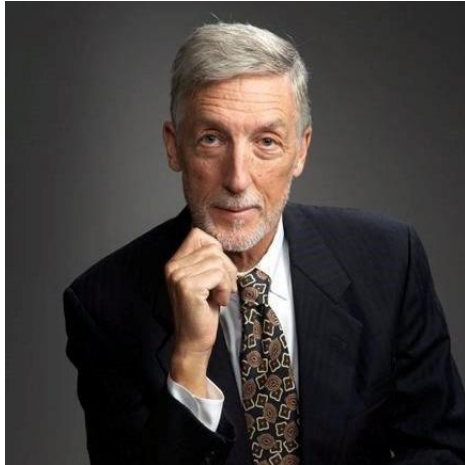


Bruce Raimy: Businessman and Civic Leader

By: David Frew, Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence

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Author's note: Bruce Raimy shared much of the information contained in this article. In addition, Bruce's brother Gary generously shared hours of interview time, providing insights that Bruce may have been too modest to reveal. Jack Schultz also provided insights into the Raimy family.



Bruce Raimy

When most people in northwestern Pennsylvania hear the name “Raimy,” they might immediately think of welding – people wearing masks and holding torches while they shape and form metal. They are likely imagining Welders Supply Company, Erie, Pennsylvania’s trusted provider of welding supplies and equipment for almost 80 years — a company launched and grown by the Raimy family. But what do welding and the name Raimy have in common with a think tank?

That may seem like a strange question unless you are familiar with Erie and its technological evolution as an economic region. This testimonial of Welders Supply Company’s Bruce Raimy is an Erie story, an important narrative, detailing the ways in which one man has contributed so much to his hometown and region.

Beyond his business acumen and work ethic that built a successful enterprise, it is an insight into Raimy’s foundational and continuing work with the Jefferson Educational Society and how Erie, Pennsylvania, could be missing its vital local think tank had Raimy not made so many key contributions in the months before and years after the Jefferson was founded in 2008.

Raimy helped co-found, fund, and sustain the Jefferson, which is now in its 17th year. This article tells the story of Bruce Raimy, his business skills, and his many contributions to the Jefferson Educational Society.



Jefferson headquarters at 3207 State St. in Erie, Pennsylvania

Erie, Pennsylvania Context

Erie was a secondary crossroad of two Native American trails until a few locals who were entering Lake Erie's infant commercial shipping industry convinced the United States government to build a naval base here. There were just a few hearty settlers in the very early 19th century, and they were blockaded to the south and west by hostile Native Americans who seemed intent upon making life difficult for them.

Erie was separated from the civilized world. No one was sure who owned this part of the world: Ohio, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, the Iroquois Nation? Eventually, and with the federal government's guidance, Pennsylvania managed to acquire the sliver of land along the shore of Lake Erie that allowed it to create a Great Lakes port, and the Erie Triangle became an official part of the commonwealth. Pennsylvania's motivation for this strategic acquisition was to gain access to Lake Erie shipping: boat building, fishing, and the about-to-explode water trade that was going to include canal transportation followed by railroad connections to the East Coast and the Atlantic Ocean. And then, within a few short years, a United States naval base was established here after the War of 1812 broke out.

Having a naval base during those days was analogous to hosting a modern NASA space station. Astonishing as it may now seem, sailing ships were the fastest form of transportation on the planet. Ships were glamorous. People regularly gathered at the downtown docks to watch as romantic sailing vessels unfurled billowing white sails and set off on voyages to unimaginable far-off places — Milwaukee, Duluth, Detroit, Chicago, and even Canada. They were places that everyone had heard about, but few had visited. The War of 1812 and the local naval base instantly changed Erie. Hundreds of sailors and boatbuilders arrived to build a fleet. In addition to the people who were directly involved in the war effort, thousands more crowded into the new town on Presque Isle Bay and the shore of Lake Erie. Family, friends, and secondary businessmen launched small businesses in support of Erie's exploding maritime economy.

Eventually the war ended, but Erie had been defined as a maritime town, filled with creative entrepreneurs who were working to develop new peacetime businesses. The dominant enterprise that quickly replaced wartime shipbuilding was commercial fishing, and it was no coincidence that the new business required boats. As the fishing business evolved, specialty fishing vessels were created locally, and Erie and Port Dover, Ontario, Canada — a companion Lake Erie fishing town to the north — became locked in a technology race.

The fishermen who built the best fishing boats were destined to make the largest profits and a stunning technology evolution commenced. Wooden sailing vessels were replaced by engine-driven fish tugs. Steam engines appeared and were soon replaced by diesel engines. And presto! The prototypical Lake Erie fish tug was born here in central Lake Erie. Eventually, wood gave way to metal, followed by the most stunning transition of all. From metal-over-wooden frameworks (composite tugs) came all-metal tugs made possible by welded steel. Within a few

decades, welded steel became the boatbuilding material of choice for fishermen. It was lighter, stronger, and offered much more interior space.

History is confused and conflicted about exactly where the all-steel, welded fish tug was invented. Some say it was Erie while others insist that it was in Port Dover. But the primary “culprit” in the rapid evolution of welded steel boats was the Lincoln Electric Welding Company from nearby Cleveland, Ohio.

Founded in the 1890s, Lincoln Electric Welding Company’s birth and growth precisely coincided with the explosion of Lake Erie commercial fishing in Erie. Lincoln salespeople called upon boatbuilders in Erie, Port Dover, and other Lake Erie fishing ports, urging them to shift away from wooden and toward welded steel hulls. And the company from Cleveland was at the service of its customers, providing welding equipment and supplies as well as the technical advice required to show boatbuilders and repair yards exactly how to design, build, and repair welded hulls.

At a time when Erie boasted more than 100 officially registered fish tugs in its harbor and 16 commercial processing houses, welding became the essential driving technology. And it was still a time when there was excitement and romance connected to the waterfront, the docks, and the businesses that populated the bayfront. The old excitement of the naval base and Erie’s identity as a shipping and fishing town was still alive.

Welding developed at a geometric pace during the first decades of the 20th century. Technical innovations made the techniques much more practical and shipbuilders from around the country began to move from riveted to welded joints in much of their work. Welding soon found applications in other businesses, and, by the World War I era, Erie had become an epicenter of welding. Soon the city earned a reputation for being the steam and boiler capital of the world, in addition to its long-held title of “freshwater fishing capital of the world” since the turn of the 20th century.

The technologies are dependent upon welding. Legend has it that the infamous drink called a “boilermaker” (a shot and a beer) was conceived in Erie. Geometric growth in the welding industry convinced Lincoln Electric to shift its sales and marketing strategies. Instead of continuing its focus on individual customer support, Lincoln shifted its focus to the creation of equipment and supplies. To help spread the “gospel” of welding, Lincoln established a proprietary welding school that continues today. The new opening in the service market encouraged the development of welding supply companies, leaving the wholesale marketing and delivery of supplies and equipment to a new style of entrepreneur.

Jack Raimy's Influence

Enter the Raimy family. In 1942, Jack Raimy was transferred to Erie by Mills Welding Supply Company of Buffalo, New York. Mills was moving to Erie to take advantage of the wildly growing market for welding equipment and supplies, and they sent Jack Raimy here to create a satellite operation. Jack Raimy moved to Erie with his family, including his sons, Gary and Bruce, and the Raimy family rented a modest duplex home on West Sixth Street. Wells Welding Supply was an amazing success thanks to the talent and work ethic of Jack Raimy. The new business grew so rapidly that its home office in Buffalo became uncomfortable with the success and sold the business to Jack.

Jack Raimy's new Erie operation, Welders Supply Company at 459 West Fourth St., was off and running. If he had demonstrated a huge work ethic while working for someone else, the opportunity to create his own welding supply center greatly intensified his efforts. Within a few years Jack Raimy had outgrown his Fourth Street location and moved to West 20th and Peach streets. Eventually, Jack outgrew the Peach Street location, as well, and built a new 12,000-square-foot facility at West 17th and Cascade streets. Welders Supply moved there in 1960 and remains at that location today.



Jack Raimy stands in front of his original store on West Fourth Street.



The Welders Supply Company truck parks near the store on West Fourth Street.

Idyllic Life

Born in 1939, Gary Raimy was the elder of Jack's two sons by two years. Gary and younger brother Bruce lived with their family in a modest home in the 400 block of West Sixth Street just a few blocks from their father's business. They were educated in Erie's public school system and graduated from Strong Vincent High School in 1957 and 1959, respectively. The boys lived in one of Erie's most interesting neighborhoods, giving them access to the bayfront and thriving downtown retail. Their grandmother had a summer place at Crystal Beach, Ontario, where they spent summers, enjoying the Lake Erie tourist mecca and sometimes working at the park.



Crystal Beach, Ontario, was a premier vacation and amusement destination.

By the time the boys reached high school they achieved rock star status. They were tall, athletic, and good students at a time when Strong Vincent was one of the region's very best schools.

Both excelled at swimming during the glory days of Erie swimming, and at a time when Strong Vincent fielded powerhouse teams. In addition, they were skilled sailors, crewing with their father on the family sailboat, "Jack Tar," and also racing small vessels in class boat races. Their sailing careers continued through college. Bruce Raimy worked as a sailing instructor at the Erie Yacht Club. After high school, Gary attended Penn State Behrend, then graduated from Penn State's University Park main campus in State College, where he majored in business. Bruce attended and graduated from Case Institute of Technology (prior to the merger with Western Reserve University), where he also majored in business administration. Both boys worked as hourly employees in the family business during high school and college, learning welding "from the bottom up."



Older brother Gary Raimy in his 1957 Strong Vincent High School graduation picture



Bruce Raimy, proud 1959 Strong Vincent High School graduate



Bruce Raimy grew up in this modest duplex home on West Sixth Street.



Jack Tar III was the third sailboat Jack Raimy owned and berthed at the Erie Yacht Club and the one that he took to Florida when he retired.

Raimy Brothers Join Welders Supply as Professional Staff

Upon their college graduation, the Raimy brothers returned to Welders Supply, which was growing so rapidly that it needed to add full-time professional employees. The boys were logical choices as new management staff since they had worked the business from “the bottom up” and also acquired sophisticated university educations and degrees — Gary in 1961, and Bruce in 1963. The boys could see the enormous growth potential in the welding supply business that their father had created. Jack had primarily been interested in making a good family living as opposed to pursuing growth possibilities or imagining ways to expand. His focus had been on customer care and relationship building.

As the brothers grew into the business after college, Gary and Bruce could see the future of welding and the countless regional possibilities for growth and development. Jack retired just two years after Gary and Bruce joined the business on a full-time basis, withdrawing rather suddenly. Unlike many business-owner fathers who continue to be involved and sometimes manage, Jack went to Florida, leaving the boys on their own to be autonomous owner-operators, free from the tinkering involvement of a parent. Bruce characterized their father’s sudden and total withdrawal from the business as a “baptism by fire” in which he and his brother were counted on to suddenly apply the broad vision they had gained during their university educations. And they did. While then 59-year-old Jack was taking a boat to Florida and beginning his retirement with his wife, Bruce and Gary were learning leadership and ownership “on the job.” Their father’s happy Florida retirement lasted until 1977 when he passed away at 69. Their mother, Danalynn (Jack’s wife) Raimy, died a few years later in 1986.

Gary and Bruce Raimy strengthened and expanded Welders Supply. They quickly pivoted from a one-location, local enterprise to a regional powerhouse by adding an autonomous second location in Jamestown, New York. The dual regional location enabled Welders Supply Company to expand its impact by serving dozens of small- to medium-sized towns in Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio. The improved supply chain they created allowed the new two-location operation to reach dozens of new customers, offering a full array of supplies as well as the old service quality. With two locations, the brothers were able to shorten delivery times significantly. They understood the potential for enormous business growth and added to the local client base that their father had cultivated on Erie’s 12th Street industrial corridor, including Union Iron, Bucyrus Erie, Erie City Iron Works, and more. Bruce attracted Erie’s General Electric as a client, a development that added enormously to sales. Within a few years of assuming operation of the business, the brothers had made Welders Supply Company into one of the top users of welding rods east of the Mississippi River.

The brothers appreciated the reputation that their father had created for customer care and began from that platform, pledging to continue that aspect of Welders Supply, while using a broader strategic vision developed through contacts acquired during their respective university educations to begin a period of significant growth. The Jamestown location helped them reach out to a greatly expanded geographic area, reaching new customers in upstate New York. Gary was excited about

the opportunity to develop the second location, so he volunteered to become the Jamestown chief executive while Bruce Raimy continued in Erie.

The shift to a two-location business more than doubled Welders Supply's business, but the Raimy brothers were not done. They also orchestrated mergers, partnerships, and acquisitions with welding supply houses in New York state, beginning with the company that had originally employed their father. In addition to large welding supply companies in Buffalo and Niagara Falls, they acquired an assembly factory in upstate New York. Their carefully positioned acquisitions and partnerships grew the core business again, more than doubling sales for a second time.

Community Involvement

As Welders Supply grew, Bruce Raimy preached a mantra of community involvement to his staff. He encouraged a wide variety of company-sponsored efforts to strengthen the local community and help it grow, offering time off as well as financial support to those who wished to volunteer. Bruce modeled this initiative by becoming involved in a large number of local boards and planning initiatives. Modesty persuades him to refer to his community problem-solving role during the years when Welders Supply was growing as that of "facilitator." He imagined that he could use his leadership, planning, and entrepreneurial skills to address important community problems and solve problems. He also served on a number of regional boards.

The initiatives where Bruce imagined that he had the most long-lasting influence included the distribution of Penelec's Erie County land and the transition to water meters by the Erie City Water Authority in the 1990s. Both initiatives served to connect him to Erie's emerging political leaders. His first effort was a delicate matter being addressed by then-Erie County Executive Judy Lynch involving Penelec and its interest in the equitable distribution of bayfront property that was no longer useful to the regional electric utility company. Several community groups were involved in a dispute over how that land should be allotted. As Lynch developed a politically neutral plan to parcel the property in a fair manner, Raimy advanced a compromise that was welcomed. He also credited civic leader Denise Illig Robison (Mullen) as being essential to the solution.

Another issue faced by then-Erie Mayor Joyce Savocchio involved the city's water operations. The water "department" had endured a number of odd miscalculations, one of which was maintaining two separate reservoir systems, one on West 26th Street and another in the form of a downtown water tower. But a more critical issue involved the city's clear need for water meters after the Erie City Water Authority was created in 1992. Several City Council members had publicly criticized the installation of water meters by raising the unrealistic concern that the average person's water bill was about to skyrocket. Years later, Raimy recalled that several of the city's largest water users were paying far too little, and that although some industrial customers might face cost increases, he argued at the time they should pay for their massive use of city water in the spirit of free market economics. Raimy noted that unmetered city water was so inexpensive that Hammermill Paper Company, a huge consumer of unmetered city water, found it less

expensive to pay a low fee for city water than to set up a system for pumping water directly into the factory from Lake Erie, just a few hundred feet away. The bulk of the water was simply being used for process cooling so that there was no aesthetic need to use the city's treated and chlorinated water in its process. Raimy's problem-solving approach won the day, meters were installed, and most individual bills decreased as industrial users paid their fair share. It also improved the political situation for Mayor Savocchio.

Perhaps Raimy's most important local contributions were made at the board level as he helped shape The Erie Community Foundation and served on the Mercyhurst College (now University) Board of Trustees. It was at Mercyhurst that he met and became impressed with the ways in which Dr. William Garvey, the college's president, helped transform a small women's college facing financial difficulties into a prosperous, co-ed, two-campus school with a growing student body and a full complement of popular sports programs, including Division I hockey, Division II basketball, and a men's football program.

Mayor Joyce Savocchio

The beautiful and technically sophisticated westside Erie Water Works facility — the Richard S. Wasielewski Water Treatment Plant at the foot of Sommerheim Drive in Millcreek Township — may not have developed without the contributions of Bruce Raimy.

Savocchio, who served as Erie's mayor from 1990 to 2002, noted the importance of Bruce Raimy's influence in her political success as well as the development of Erie's water infrastructure. Savocchio came to politics from a long career as a teacher and administrator, and served the city for 20 years, eight as a city councilwoman and 12 as mayor. She followed six-term Mayor Louis J. Tullio and inherited a city that faced significant infrastructure and financial issues, including a negative bond rating.

In retrospect, she said, one of her most important accomplishments was rebuilding the water infrastructure and leading City Council to create the Erie City Water Authority, today's Erie Water Works. While dozens of American cities like Flint, Michigan struggle with toxic water issues and or an inadequate water supply for business, Erie now enjoys world-class water and an infrastructure that promises an unlimited and bright future. While it isn't perfect, Erie's water filtration system has the ability to deal with invasive species and harmful algae blooms, a technical feat that has separated this community from most municipal water systems on the Great Lakes.

Savocchio said she became convinced of the critical importance of creating an autonomous water authority during her City Council years but opposition from a majority of council members led by Mario Bagnoni against Tullio stalled the sale and creation of an authority. As the city's new chief executive, Savocchio organized several task forces, one of which addressed water, and Raimy became an important member. She said she had not known Bruce well prior to that time but that he was highly recommended by her key business ally, Ralph Reed.

Savocchio described Raimy as the exact opposite of “an empty seat.” He did not join the mayor’s task force for notoriety or out of political obligation. He was a problem solver and a high-energy force toward progress on a number of matters, most notably water. While Savocchio worried that the needed shift to water meters could harm her political career, Raimy demonstrated how metering would help Erie, and particularly the typical citizen. Bruce was able to see the big picture, find technical solutions, and sell his ideas to Erie residents. Raimy, a Republican, often communicated the important work of Democrat Savocchio and her team to the business community, she said. She also credited Bruce for his work with the formation and success of the Jefferson Educational Society, where they serve as founding board members and longtime leaders of the Board of Trustees.

Powerful Local Women Political Leaders

Raimy credits Erie’s political leadership and four women in particular — Lynch, Savocchio, Robison Mullen, and Christine Riehl — for making great contributions to the community. Raimy said he marveled at how Erie had produced such a powerful generation of female leaders and learned they were preceded by older generations of woman leaders, giving hope that the region was positioned to be a leader in inclusivity.



*Dr. Judy Lynch, Erie County’s
five-term executive (1982 to 2001)*



*Erie Mayor Joyce Savocchio
(1990 to 2002)*

Birth of the Jefferson Society

Discussions to create a community-based think tank, according to Raimy, had begun in earnest in spring 2005 when Raimy returned to Erie from his seasonal home in Florida. At the time, Garvey was serving as a historian in residence at the Erie County Historical Society (now Hagen History Center), one of the many local organizations where he had served as board chairman and made notable contributions, including the establishment of the Journal of Erie Studies.

Garvey, Raimy, and a few others agreed that Erie needed a nonpartisan think tank, a place where important ideas could be developed and put into service, and local colleges and universities could partner in the development of essential initiatives. As Raimy recalled, Garvey's original idea was to call the new organization the "Cicero Society," to be named after the famous Roman statesman and scholar. Eventually, they settled on the name "Jefferson Educational Society," thinking of "America's Cicero," Thomas Jefferson, one of America's founders and the third president of the United States.

It was Raimy, Erie's long-time community facilitator and leader, who helped drive a new idea just as he had so many times in the past. Raimy and Garvey each pledged \$50,000 to the new think tank and applied for permission to register as a nonprofit with the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In short order, Judy Lynch joined the founding group.

Raimy said he was proud that he had urged that women be involved in governance and programming. To that end he helped recruit Savocchio, Robison Mullen, and later Riehl to the organization. Others, such as the Rev. Charles Brock, William C. Sennett, Tom Hagen, Charles Caryl, Rabbi Leonard Lifshen, John Malone, Jeff Szumigale, and Dave Chrzanowski played important roles in the early organization. Lynch would become the Jefferson's first chairwoman.

But there was one more important matter to be resolved. Where would Erie's new think tank be located?

Partnering with Brith Shalom

Membership in Erie's Jewish community had been declining but remained vibrant when the Jefferson Society and Brith Shalom entered a unique partnership.

Brith Shalom has had a long Erie history. Founded in 1897 when the congregation was on East 18th Street, growing pains persuaded the congregation to move twice, eventually building a large and beautiful facility on State Street in 1950. But the temple had grown perhaps too large to support its congregation and welcomed discussions with the Jefferson leadership



Some key members of the Brith Shalom Congregation with Rabbi Mark Asher Goodman

Enter Bruce Raimy. Instead of building a new and expensive facility to house the Jefferson or rehabilitating an older and available building, Raimy and others began to work with the Brith Shalom congregation, hoping that a shared building could solve two problems at once: a new home for the Jefferson and a way to secure the future for the State

Street Jewish temple. Eventually, a facilities partnership agreement was crafted in 2008. Later, in 2013, the Jefferson took ownership of the building, completed a major renovation, and the Brith Shalom partnership continued.

Building and Defining the Jefferson

Raimy was also important in helping to define the approach of Jefferson programming. The essence of the new think tank would be politically nonpartisan, so that ideas and arguments from every political viewpoint could be included.

Working to find financial and ideological supporters, Garvey made a key, critical hire in the JES's earliest days – a recently graduated intelligence studies major from Mercyhurst, Ferki Ferati. Ferati would serve as the think tank's first director of research and operations, charged with researching think-tank models at the time of the launch. They identified the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., and 92nd Street Y in New York City as working models, and Ferati was quickly promoted to executive director by 2009. Along the way, he completed his masters of public administration from another Erie college, Gannon University, in 2012, became the JES's first vice president a year later, and completed his doctoral studies from the University of Pittsburgh in 2017 – the same year the JES's Board of Trustees unanimously voted to name him the think tank's second president.

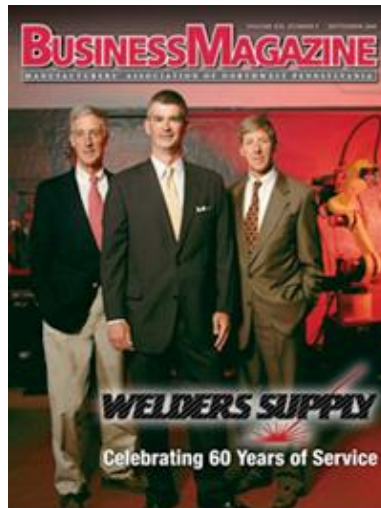
There from the very beginning, Raimy proudly notes that Ferati has developed into a strong president. Ferati's dissertation topic, Raimy recalled, focused on the Chautauqua Movement that swept the nation in the mid-1800s into the early 1900s. According to Raimy, Ferati's leadership is ensuring the long-term growth and stability of the Jefferson.

Business Succession

Taking a cue from his father's retirement plan, Bruce Raimy decided to leave the business and move to Florida (on a seasonal basis) in 2006. His brother Gary followed soon after, retiring from the business in 2008. To help solidify their financial futures and launch their retirements, the brothers invited their New York state partners to buy out their shares of the Buffalo and Niagara Falls partner operations. Bruce divested himself of his shares first, and Gary followed a few years later. Bruce moved south with wife Kathleen Donohoue "KD" Raimy, who died in 2015 after 49 years of marriage.

Bruce and Kathleen's three sons all left Erie to pursue careers. The middle son, Eric, is a tenured professor at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The youngest son, Brian, has a dream job in the outdoor industry, working for L.L. Bean and living in Freeport, Maine. Bruce's oldest son, Mark, has been chief executive of Welders Supply for several years. He had always been interested in the family business and had expressed an interest in returning to Erie, but he had left town to pursue a career in finance. Mark was enjoying a highly successful, 15-year career when it became

apparent that Welders Supply was going to need a third generation to lead it into the future. He returned to Erie and began working at Welders Supply in 2005 so that he would be positioned to take over as CEO when Bruce retired and left for Florida with Kathleen.



Bruce and Gary Raimy stand with Mark Raimy

Mark Raimy continues as chief executive and has continued to grow the company and its two primary locations, Erie and Jamestown. Like his father and uncle, Mark is focused on offering the same customer care that has characterized Welders Supply since his grandfather Jack founded the Erie company. In addition to “unparalleled customer delight,” Mark has added a second important business pillar: safety.

Family Life



Eric Raimy, University of Wisconsin professor

A conversation with Bruce’s son, Eric, centered on the roots of Bruce Raimy’s approach to life, the motives for his philanthropy, and his family and business philosophies.

A tenured professor at the University of Wisconsin, Eric said that the “essence of Bruce” is enormous modesty and can be attributed in part to the family’s ethnic heritage. The Raimy family is Danish, a culture that is best characterized by the “Law of Jante,” a code of conduct that can be summarized by one principle: “Do not think that you are special or that you are better than anyone else.”

This egalitarian precept, which characterizes Scandinavian culture, was the driving principle of life in the Raimy family, according to Eric. Anyone who knows Bruce is taken first with his generosity. The original Raimy family member in the United States was actually a Dane named Christian Rasmussen, who settled in upstate New York. Eric noted that one of the most defining characteristics of

Danish people is their adaptability and that Rasmussen demonstrated that very thing when he changed his name from Rasmussen to Raimy once he realized Americans had a hard time pronouncing Rasmussen.

As Eric posited, his dad used the same guiding principle to raise his three sons. Family was important and everyone spent time together. "There was one television, four channels, and everyone gathered to watch the same programs," he said. And as the boys grew up, they were given complete freedom to direct their own lives.

Eric, for example, was never interested in business or in working at Welders Supply, he said. After a charmed childhood, which included boating with his family and taking sailing lessons at the Erie Yacht Club, then graduating from Cathedral Prep, Eric decided to go to the University of Toronto to major in linguistics, a decision that seemed foreign to his father but that he supported, nonetheless. After graduating with a double degree in linguistics and philosophy, Eric moved back home and spent a year trying to decide what to do next.

As he learned during his post-graduation time in Erie, his academic skills had prepared him for either a career in pizza delivery, which he did for a while, or for graduate school. Eric chose the latter, again with his father's support, and he moved to the University of Delaware, where he earned both a master's degree and a Ph.D. in linguistics.

Eric recalled that his time in Delaware helped him further appreciate the egalitarian approach that his father had brought to Raimy family life. Bruce and Kathleen's three boys were encouraged to make their own decisions and, no matter what they were, Bruce supported them. While Mark Raimy, the oldest son, pursued a career track that was most logical to Bruce and his life at Welders Supply, Eric noted that as far as his father was concerned it was no better or more important than the aspirations of his other sons. While Mark went to Dennison University to study finance, their father was equally supportive of his other two sons and their careers.

These days Eric said he is happy to have developed an excellent relationship with his father.

Lynn Lagomarsino's Friendship

In 2017, mutual friends arranged a blind date between Bruce and a retired certified public accountant from New Jersey. Lynn Lagomarsino had also suffered the death of her spouse. Her husband had passed away after a short but difficult battle with a malignant brain tumor.

Bruce and Lynn's matchmaking friends knew they shared a love of golf. Lynn was a 10-handicap golfer and Bruce was also an excellent golfer, though the matchmakers also were concerned about their starkly different personalities. Could Bruce, the Pennsylvania introvert, and Lynn, a New Jersey extrovert, get along? They certainly did.

Beginning with several rounds of golf, their friendship grew steadily and the differences between them became strengths. Bruce was drawn to Lynn and her large Italian family, which included local children, grandchildren, and others. Lynn said she still can't stop marveling at meeting an understated, successful businessman and community advocate. In her New Jersey experience, she

said, the businessmen she knew were far less accomplished than Bruce, yet they could not stop bragging about their achievements.

As Lynn began to meet Bruce's friends and family, she was surprised to learn about the extent to which he had helped build a powerful business and also contributed to Erie. Rarely did a day go by without someone revealing a new story about how Bruce had rescued a distressed Erie organization, or helped Mercyhurst College, the Jefferson Society, the Water Authority, Penelec, the Erie Zoo, or Goodwill, to name just a few. And Lynn's business acumen helped her appreciate how Bruce had contributed to those organizations in terms of "the bottom and top lines."

Lynn said she continues to admire how Bruce still loves Erie and stays in touch. She said he receives the Erie newspaper every day and never fails to devour it and then makes phone calls, offering ideas and continued support.

Living in Naples, Florida, Bruce and Lynn have connected there, as well, and he has offered his civic consciousness and problem-solving skills to his new community. Bruce and Lynn are engaged and have become life partners. They have made several trips to Erie together as Bruce has introduced her to the community and to Presque Isle.

Meanwhile, Lynn Lagomarsino continues to appreciate the tall, handsome man she calls "Brucey," and his unassuming ways. Using a series of free association adjectives, she described him as wicked smart, unassuming, modest, generous, and reluctant to take credit. She laughingly noted that she still struggles to "pry things out of him," the kinds of things that almost anyone else would have bragged about.

Cruel Irony

A few years ago, Bruce was diagnosed with Pulmonary Fibrosis, a disease that systematically destroys the lungs, making breathing difficult. The disease, which would be devastating for anyone, was especially difficult for Bruce, who has continued to be an athlete into his adult life. The once-skilled marathon runner suddenly found himself struggling to perform daily activities.

Raimy remains optimistic about his health, however. While the lung-scarring illness was once an almost certain death sentence with a brief time horizon, advances in medicine and therapy have changed the old prognosis, offering hope. Bruce is approaching the management of his disease in the same way that he ran his professional life — with active problem-solving involvement. He has researched the disease and decided to use an active rather than passive approach to managing it. Bruce is currently swimming almost every day to strengthen his lungs, walking vigorously, and playing golf several times per week. He is not in denial about the seriousness of pulmonary fibrosis but committed to actively fighting for his health.

Bright Jefferson Future

Prospects for the Jefferson's future brighten Bruce Raimy's mood. As the longtime vice president of the Jefferson Board of Trustees, he continues to imagine that his shepherding of the new think tank's development is among his most important contributions. When quizzed regarding the most

critical operational initiatives needed for the Jefferson's continued success, he listed several goals for future success:

1. The Global Summit speaker series. The creation and continued growth of the Jefferson's fall lecture series and continued attention to recruiting world-class speakers continues to be essential to the identity and growth of the organization.
2. New supporters. The Jefferson's health will become increasingly dependent upon its ability to attract new groups of people to its programming. One example of this was the addition of basketball legend John Calipari to the 2023 Global Summit, which brought an entirely new cohort to Jefferson — sports fans. That has continued with Stephen A. Smith, Fred Biletnikoff, and others.
3. Stable leadership. Ferki Ferati was an understated gift to the organization, Bruce said. His academic preparation, combined with the timing of his arrival at the birth of the Jefferson has placed him in a position to guide the future. It was providential that he was there to do research and development at the beginning stages of the Jefferson and then grow experientially into the role of president. His academic achievements in earning a doctorate and defending a dissertation on the Chautauqua Movement could not have been more appropriate. It is essential that the Jefferson convinces him to remain in his current leadership position.
4. Diverse perspectives. The Jefferson demonstrated an early understanding of the power and importance of diverse leadership when it recruited four of Erie's most powerful female leaders to be an essential part of the organization: Judy Lynch, Joyce Savocchio, Denise Robison Mullen, and Christine Riehl. The future of the Jefferson will depend upon its continuing ability to present programming to a wide range of people to attract diverse membership and leadership.
5. Programming. The development and promotion of quality programming has been and will continue to be essential to the future of the Jefferson. The organization must creatively add the best possible programming and simultaneously test and improve the efficacy of each of its offerings. The Jefferson's programming has been enhanced by taking it into the surrounding community to places, such as the lower eastside of the city of Erie, Fairview, Harborcreek, Corry, and Edinboro.
6. Community improvement. The core role of a think tank is to support and improve its community, and the Jefferson has continued that vital mission effectively by launching the Civic Leadership Academy and internship programs that continue to grow. One of these programs, the Raimy Fellowship program, was named after Bruce Raimy. It has grown significantly in recent years, producing groundbreaking research, papers, and programs. A "Raimy Wall" featuring the photographs and work of the first 16 Raimy Fellows was recently erected in the Jefferson's Monticello Room.

7. Financial development. Like most nonprofit organizations, the Jefferson will continue to find and develop donors who will be able to contribute to its endowment. Raimy has assisted on this with a major gift program, and he has left an additional endowment in his estate.

About the Author

Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is a Scholar-in-Residence at the JES. An emeritus professor at Gannon University, he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.