



William K. Cordier

Founder and Chairman
Cordier Group Holdings Inc.
and Cordier Management LLC
BSME '49

For his outstanding entrepreneurship in building advanced manufacturing infrastructure critical to U.S. needs, and his continuing multifaceted support for the Purdue community

More Than Football

“I was born in South Bend, in the shadow of Notre Dame,” says William Cordier. “As a child, I thought football was why colleges exist, but my parents explained that college is a lot more than football. They extolled the *academic* virtues of the schools Notre Dame played, and they talked a lot about Purdue. Later, my favorite high school teacher recommended an engineering career and called Purdue a ‘standout school, if you can hack it!’ I decided I wanted to become a Boilermaker engineer.”

But World War II intervened. Cordier joined the U.S. Navy and was accepted into its V5 program and sent to Rensselaer Polytech, where he studied freshman engineering. “Later, I entered preflight training at Pensacola. The war’s end caused a lull in the V5 program, which I used for summer study at Purdue. That reinforced my desire to enter Purdue full time, so I left the Navy.”

Part of Something Larger

According to Cordier, Purdue’s demanding engineering curriculum and superb faculty provided plenty of challenges and instilled the ability to “hit the ground running” as he began his first job in design engineering. “But Purdue gave me more than that,” he says. “Interactions I had with

certain professors and with nonengineering students broadened my outlook and made me better prepared for my career and life, more so than some engineers I later encountered.” He remembers Professor Bill Miller’s lectures on professional ethics. “Miller told us we would be entering a *profession* with all that connotes,” says Cordier. “My degree would be more than a license for a job. I would be part of something larger. That’s why I became a Registered Professional Engineer after graduation.”

Purdue also taught Cordier that “engineers are *creative problem solvers*, always seeking *optimum* solutions,” he says. It was a lesson confirmed throughout his career. “Our work isn’t centered on memorized rules or canned solutions from other situations. I believe that’s why engineers are so adaptable to other demanding occupations and often become superb business managers and executives.”

Great Opportunities

“Becoming a Purdue engineer was one of three special opportunities that shaped my career,” says Cordier. “Our engineering school’s great reputation opened many doors for advancement. Its excellent academic preparation made me confident and capable of performing well, immediately after graduation.”

A second special opportunity was joining General Electric early in his career. “GE stressed that engineering is part of the whole business process and that an engineer should learn about all aspects of business.”

A third opportunity occurred when scientists at GE’s Research Labs discovered how to synthesize diamonds. “I was the first engineer assigned to explore commercialization,” says Cordier. “After living with and learning from those scientists, I started a development lab, designed commercial-scale presses and pressure apparatus, and helped perfect processes. We built and I managed a pilot plant and then the world’s first diamond manufacturing factory. After entering the market, we grew the project into a successful global enterprise. I was the business’s general manager for ten years. Here was the closest thing I could imagine to an entrepreneurial business startup, within a large corporation.”

Cordier benefited from many broadening assignments at GE and was the then-youngest graduate from GE’s coveted General Management Course. He was one of five general managers selected to experiment with modern strategic planning, led a corporate task force studying GE’s involvements in Europe, and became a corporate staff executive. After helping

plan and structure Corporate Consulting Services, he directed its consulting units for General Management, Strategic Planning, and Marketing and managed GE’s advertising and sales promotion operation.

Entrepreneurship, the Ultimate Test

Cordier left GE to become executive vice president of B. F. Goodrich Company and, later, senior vice president of Macmillian Inc. He was also CEO of two smaller businesses before striking out on his own. “Having learned so much about business as a ‘hired hand,’ my wife and I decided to commit our family resources for the ultimate test: *entrepreneurship*. I formed a holding company and we acquired, operated, and improved three industrial businesses during the last eighteen years of my career. Those years brought fascinating management problems to solve, much business success, and great personal satisfaction.”



1998–2003 Chairman, President’s Council, Purdue; Member, Purdue Strategic Planning Committee; Part-time consultant, Cordier Management LLC

1998 Endowed Graduate Fellowship in Mechanical Engineering, Purdue

1995 Outstanding Mechanical Engineer, Purdue

1981–98 Formed Cordier Group Holdings Inc., an entrepreneurial holding company. Chairman and CEO—Cordier Group Holdings Inc. and each of its operating subsidiaries: Canton Drop Forge Inc., acquired in 1981; the Oloffson Corp., acquired in 1985; Oloffson Fabrications Inc., acquired in 1985. Directorships: National City Bank, NE; Forging Industry Association; Forging Industry Educational and Research Foundation; Morgan Funshares

1979–81 Senior Vice President, Macmillan Inc. Responsible for all nonpublishing subsidiaries. President and CEO—CG Conn Ltd.

1975–79 Executive Vice President, B. F. Goodrich Co. Member—Management Committee. Responsible for Corporate Engineering, Law, Treasury, Controller, Auditing, Employee Relations, Data Processing and Planning Divisions; Director—BancOhio NB; Director—Nobel Company; Senior Warden—Episcopal Church

1952–75 General Electric Co. Various engineering, manufacturing, management, and staff positions.

1949–52 Design Engineer, Stapling Machines Co.

BSME '49, Purdue; graduate studies, Stevens Institute of Technology, Newark College of Engineering