

Induction is reflection of life and career

By Bob Shryock

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When toastmaster Fred Swartz introduces Bruce Eckman at tonight's county sports hall of fame induction ceremony at Auletto's, he may want to edit Eckman's resumé slightly in the interest of time. But that wouldn't be easy. The former Pitman High student-athlete has reached the zenith of his career through a research firm he created 25 years ago. If Swartz read just a partial list of Fortune 500 clients Eckman has helped as a marketing consultant — for starters, try Disney World, CBS, and Coca-Cola — the audience would be in for a long night.

Pitman High School's 1964 football team was a juggernaut, going only to Gloucester in one of those games no one forgets — and well over 5,000 saw it on a perfect autumn Saturday afternoon. Players like Ken Green, Larry Duke, Mel Joyce, Joe Moser, Paul Godman, Beanie Hoemaker and Bruce Eckman, 11 members of the Class of 1965, anchored the line. Fellow senior lucky Jaggard (running back) and juniors Jim Baxter (quarterback) and Ed Woolley (fullback) helped make the offense lethal. They were a close group, and they were winners.

Eckman, Class of '65 salutatorian, stood out. He captured scores of post-season football honors,



BRUCE ECKMAN

then lettered in basketball and track, setting a school discus record during the heyday of Panther sports. He became Gloucester County's first scholar-athlete of the year.

Eckman's success in sports, he believes more than 40 years later, translated to monumental success in the business world.

"I developed an intestinal fortitude from playing sports," he said from his home in Sherborne near Boston. "I often had to play hurt and learned to endure and ignore pain. I was relatively small compared to other players at my position, but was able to recover faster, be quicker, have better

form, and control the line of scrimmage better than most.

"This set me up to handle rejection in the business world. I learned how to come back from adversity, how to put out more than the other guy, and how to get the project won or done.

"Sports helped me to have an innate confidence in myself from having overcome many obstacles that come through when you meet me. Playing sports and being from South Jersey also made me a regular guy, not one to be flattered by status, but able to remember my roots, family and community values. It's made me a better person."

At Princeton University, Eckman was a carbon copy of himself, graduating with honors in psychology in 1969 after playing football four years and starting all 27 games for the varsity at offense tackle in the vaunted single-wing attack. One of his Tiger teams shared the Ivy championship with Harvard. Eckman made All-America honorable mention.

Meanwhile, Bruce worked summers with his dad, H. Leonard Eckman, in the family insurance business which still thrives today under the leadership of Bruce's brother, Len Jr. This helped pay college bills and gave him a few bucks to travel.

Len Sr. wanted Bruce to follow him into the business and Bruce tried, getting his insurance license.

But there was a different call-

ing for Bruce Eckman.

He spent a year at Columbia University Medical School, but lost interest in becoming an M.D. and switched to New York University, where he earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology. He became an assistant professor at Queens College of the City University of New York, teaching social and clinical psychology with a subspecialty in nonverbal communication and research methods. At the same time, Eckman had an individual and group psychotherapy practice in New York City.

Eckman designed a test using music and other non-verbal cues to determine personality traits in children who had verbal and psychological impairments. Later he adapted the technique for an applied marketing audience.

In 1983 Eckman started Creative Insights Inc., a research firm that still flourishes today.

"Creative Insights uses psychological and projective techniques to extract sensitive data, unattainable through regular market research interviewing," says Eckman, who has conducted nearly 1,000 research projects.

Eckman created and holds the trademark to Strategic Imagery, a technique that measures brand identity. This permits him to offer "brand aids" to boost struggling brands in a client's portfolio.

He received two "Effies" (Campbell Soup in 1983,

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Eckman: Inducted into Hall of Fame

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UNICEF in 1986) for advertising effectiveness.

And working as an independent consultant, Eckman has had hundreds of clients. A short list includes General Mills, Heinz, Time Magazine, Johnson & Johnson, United Way, Merrill Lynch, U.S. Army, U.S. Department of Labor, Molson Brewing Co., Monsanto, People Magazine, ABC, Anheuser-Busch, Pillsbury, Quaker Oats, Reebok, British Airways and Citibank.

Eckman worked with advertising giants Bill Backer

and Carl Spielvogel on Miller Lite's epic "Taste's great/less filling" celebrity feud series prior to starting his own firm.

Eckman had two children from his first marriage and his wife Shelly, a social psychologist, has four. They also have six grandchildren. Bruce's son, Dashiell, 29, is an actor. Dylan, 22, majors in philosophy at Vassar. The family has a home in Sherborne and an apartment in Manhattan, with offices in both locations, and a home at Martha's Vineyard.

"I'm in good health and

don't even think of retirement," Eckman says. "This (induction) is as good as it gets. It's a reflection of your career and life. It gives it legitimacy and importance."

Bruce's dad, the late Len Sr., was a popular businessman who did moonlighting as a newspaper columnist ("Through the Knothole"). His mother, Edith, passed away three years ago.

Both Len Sr. and Bruce's uncle, Dave Budd, the former N.Y. Knick, are already county hall of famers.

Tonight it's Bruce's turn.