

# The Edward Mott Moore Layperson Award Winner

## Robert Dobies

Bob Dobies has lived a large life from humble beginnings. He was one of the first in his family to graduate high school and attend college. Hailing from Schenectady, he earned a wrestling scholarship from New York University. His dad was a factory worker. His mom was a homemaker. The family lived in a small house with four of his mom's sisters during World War II. His dad and aunts worked at the factory and mom cared for all of them during the war. He graduated from NYU in 1965 and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps then officer school. In 1966, at the age of 23, he married the love of his life, Maureen, who was 19 and in nursing school at the time. Soon after, he left for the Vietnam War and served from August 1966 through November 1967. During his time in the Marine Corps, he was promoted from 2nd to 1st Lieutenant then Captain before he was discharged with honors. Strangely, nothing he did was related to healthcare, it was all infantry.

Before the war, he worked as a summer intern for Mobil Oil Company "counting beans" so when he returned, he was hired as a full-time accountant. Mobil played a huge part in his life's adventures. He lived in NYC for a few years then moved to Rochester in 1977. "The Rochester area was instrumental for Mobil and the Mobil Plastic Business sales increased from \$5000-\$5 billion. I liked the people in Rochester and lived there for two years. In the following years we lived in 13 different houses. Every job got bigger." In total they resided in NYC, CT, MD, Illinois, Italy and Luxembourg. "We moved around a lot and I kinda fell into this healthcare stuff," he laughs. "My wife is a saint."

For two years, he was the CFO of Mobil Chemical in Conn/VA/MD. "We made film for food packaging, selling business to business. When I returned to Rochester as General Manager of the Global Films Business, I managed 3000 people, 8 plants and traveled to Europe one week a

month," he says. Over the years, he had to make difficult decisions. "The hardest thing I've ever done is terminate an employee. When it gets to that point it means you've waited too long to be honest with them. You let things slide hoping it would improve. You're not honest and you're not coaching them," he says. It was a big job that ended with his mandatory retirement at age 65. Back in 1999, Mobil and Exxon merged and with this included an Exxon policy that when you turn 65 you must retire- even if you are at the top of your game and have many more years of work ahead you. What was Exxon's loss, was Rochester's gain. He now had time to commit to things that were important to him and put his effort into our community. His retirement is what led to his second act in the healthcare industry.



"At this point I had time, so became Chairman of the Board at Rochester General (6 years) and Rochester Regional (4 years). The CEO and Chair were also on the board at RIT for reciprocal board membership between the two. I was more active in the RRH board because it only had 13 members. With leadership, there are times you bring in people to change things and other times you bring people in to maintain things," he states. With his 'Chairman of the Board' title also came a renewed focus on a quality patient experience. "I believe the Quality Assurance Committee is the most important-even more so than the finance- because you need a quality patient experience." One of his greatest professional accomplishments was being a part of the Rochester General and Unity Hospital collaboration. "They didn't think we could pull it off. To the benefit of the community it has been successful. This is a healthcare and education based community," says Dobies.

When asked what he believes the biggest challenge that the health care community is facing his answer is a

resounding- cost. "People don't understand healthcare costs. Hospitals barely break even. The state is over-bedded... In-patient utilization is going down. People are being seen outside at outpatient facilities and urgent care. Hospitals are now like intensive care units. Smaller hospitals can't afford specialists so they have to share protocols."

He does believe that there is a possibility for great improvements though. We now have telemedicine and hospitalists are able to review cases then relay the information to the specialists. There are unique ways to help. "Taking all of the 'back room' stuff out of the hospital, like customer service and billing, will save costs as reimbursement goes down. Higher volumes of patients can increase with 15 minute visits instead of 30 minutes. Scribes help the docs see more people. Quality and logistics are important to streamline things. It's a tough business. Thin margins, changing technology and people intensive- you need the people," he states.

No matter what he has accomplished in his life, career-wise, it is nothing compared to the pride he has for his family. His wife, Maureen, and two successful daughters and a bunch of grandkids. His kids graduated from the American International School of Luxembourg. One daughter works at Microsoft and lives in Seattle with her son, the other is a nurse and adjunct professor at Isabella Graham Nursing School with Rochester Regional Health and lives in Rochester with four kids. What would surprise people the most about him would be that, even as a Marine, he cries when he's happy and his wife was the disciplinarian. "My daughters had me wrapped around their little fingers," he says.

He credits four people with his success. His dad, a man who had no high school education but had a wealth of integrity, who worked twice as hard as everyone else and did what no one else wanted to do while providing for his family. His mom, a Sicilian matron, leader of her family and 1 of 9 kids. She was compassionate, always interested in other people and was an excellent listener. "Once, she went with my wife to the hospital to visit my father on the third floor and there was another person on the elevator with them. She immediately started speaking to him. By the time they made it to the 3rd floor, that stranger was giving her a kiss goodbye!" he laughs. And lastly, his wife, Mo. "We've been married 54 years. She's a nurse and a good judge of people. I'm thick-headed and she is very tolerant and typically right! She moved all over the world with me. She's so active in the community, with friends and with the grandkids that I never see her," he jokes. Career-wise he found inspiration and guidance in board member, John Riedman (a local businessman and philanthropist). "He took me under his wing and taught me about the board and hospital. Tough man but had a big heart that he gave fully to this town. He probably ticked a lot of people off but

was a good guy who would never let you pay for anything because he didn't want to be beholden to anyone," says Dobies.

Since his retirement, Bob Dobies has done countless things for the healthcare community. Right now his passion project is with the Equi Center, at the William and Mildred Levine Ranch in Honeoye Falls, NY. He's been chairman of the board since December 2019. The Equi Center exists to foster the personal growth and individual achievement of children and adults with disabilities, at-risk youth, veterans, and their families using a wide range of therapeutic equestrian and related programs. Equine-related programs currently offered include therapeutic horseback riding, horsemanship, and Heroes for Horses, a program that uses a variety of equine-related therapies to help war veterans and their families. Other programs include therapeutic horticulture on their 3-acre organic farm, canine-assisted activities, adaptive yoga, and farm-to-table culinary classes. "I want us to move on strategically. There is a waitlist. They rely on volunteers. They need more exposure. We are planning an expansion and would like to have a bigger impact on the community," states Dobies. What we know for sure is that when Bob Dobies puts his focus on something, he will do his best to make it happen.

At the conclusion of our interview, when asked if there was anything else he would like to share his response was this... "I've lived all over and people complain about the taxes and the weather here. This is such a great place to raise a family. There's culture, healthcare, good education, affordable living. Even with the big guys like Kodak, Bausch & Lomb downsizing, we're still a vibrant community and have things going on. We're revitalizing." Rochester is much like Dobies, himself. Vibrant and continually revitalizing.



*EquiCenter Inc. at the William and Mildred Levine Ranch in Honeoye Falls. Photo from EquiCenterNY.org*