

# Saunders built reputation for creating, giving

By VELVET SPICER

**P**hilip Saunders has made his mark in the Rochester region through a number of calculated business decisions and a spirit of giving back to the community.

Known for both his business acumen and his philanthropic efforts, Saunders' ventures are far-reaching and diverse: He built a multimillion-dollar national chain of truck stops, stepped in to revitalize two area ski resorts and has donated millions of dollars to area schools and charities.

"Phil is someone that can be counted on for support and creativity," said David Flaum, president of Flaum Management Co. Inc. and a partner in numerous ventures with Saunders. "His many business successes have impacted the Rochester economy, and his innovative management techniques have changed how business is done."

Saunders has dabbled in a variety of business ventures through the years. During the 1960s he was co-owner of Truckstops of America, which began with a single truck stop he took over from his father. Saunders sold the chain to Ryder Systems Inc. in 1972.

Saunders later founded Travel Ports of America Inc., which merged with Ryder's TravelCenters of America in 1999. Today TravelCenters is the nation's largest chain of truck stops.

From there Saunders ventured into liquid-fuels distribution and convenience stores. In 1979 he purchased W.W. Griffith Oil Corp. and began the Sugar Creek Corp. chain of retail gas and convenience stores.

In 1997 Saunders and Rochester attorney Dante Gullace bought Lyndon Guaranty Bank of New York from ITT Corp., renaming it Genesee Regional Bank. Saunders now serves as chairman of GRB.

"Phil has excellent business judgment and intuition as to where trends and technology are headed," Flaum said. "His crystal ball is clear and right on point."

In 1998 Saunders sold Griffith Oil Inc. to Rochester Gas and Electric Corp.'s Energetix subsidiary. Two years later he sold the 105-store Sugar Creek chain to Tops Markets Inc., which merged the convenience stores with its own 117-store Wilson Farms



A. Sue Weisler/RIT

**Saunders, with Albert Simone in 2006, gave \$13 million to fund expanded facilities at the renamed E. Philip Saunders College of Business at Rochester Institute of Technology.**

Neighborhood Food Stores operation.

In recent years Saunders and Flaum have spearheaded revitalization efforts at Swain Ski & Snowboard Center and Bristol Harbour, including adding homes, a lodge and other amenities to revive the resorts.

"That one's mostly a labor of love," Flaum said of Saunders' efforts at Swain. "He cares a great deal about the future of Rochester and Upstate New York."

Saunders' investment there—not far from his home—chiefly reflected his concerns about the facility closing and hundreds of jobs disappearing.

Though known for his savvy and varied business decisions—he also has served as CEO of Econo-Car International Inc., American Rock Salt Co. LLC and Richardson Foods Corp.—Saunders' philanthropic efforts also are sweeping. Last year he donated \$13 million to Rochester Institute of Technology's College of Business. RIT renamed the college the E. Philip Saunders College of Business.

"If I were to describe one of Phil's most distinguishing characteristics, it's loyalty,"

former RIT president Albert Simone said. "A good part of his gift to RIT is going into an endowment to support full scholarships for students graduating from Livonia and Dansville high schools where he went to school and where he lives."

In 2005 Saunders donated more than \$1 million to Nicholas H. Noyes Memorial Hospital in Dansville, the largest cash gift in the hospital's history, and in 2001 he established the Saunders Family Neuromuscular Research Fund with a \$1 million gift to the University of Rochester Medical Center.

Saunders supports Paul Smith College in the Adirondacks and his wife, Carol, heads the Saunders Family Foundation, which supports several local causes. Saunders was a 2004 Rochester Business Hall of Fame inductee and in 2005 received the Herbert W. Vanden Brul Entrepreneurial Award.

"His love for his family and friends is legendary," Flaum said. "His fairness, honesty and hard work have gained the respect of not only the Rochester community but are far-reaching across the country."

vspicer@rbj.net / 585-546-8303