

B R U C E P O T T L E

THE MAN WHO TOUCHED MANY LIVES

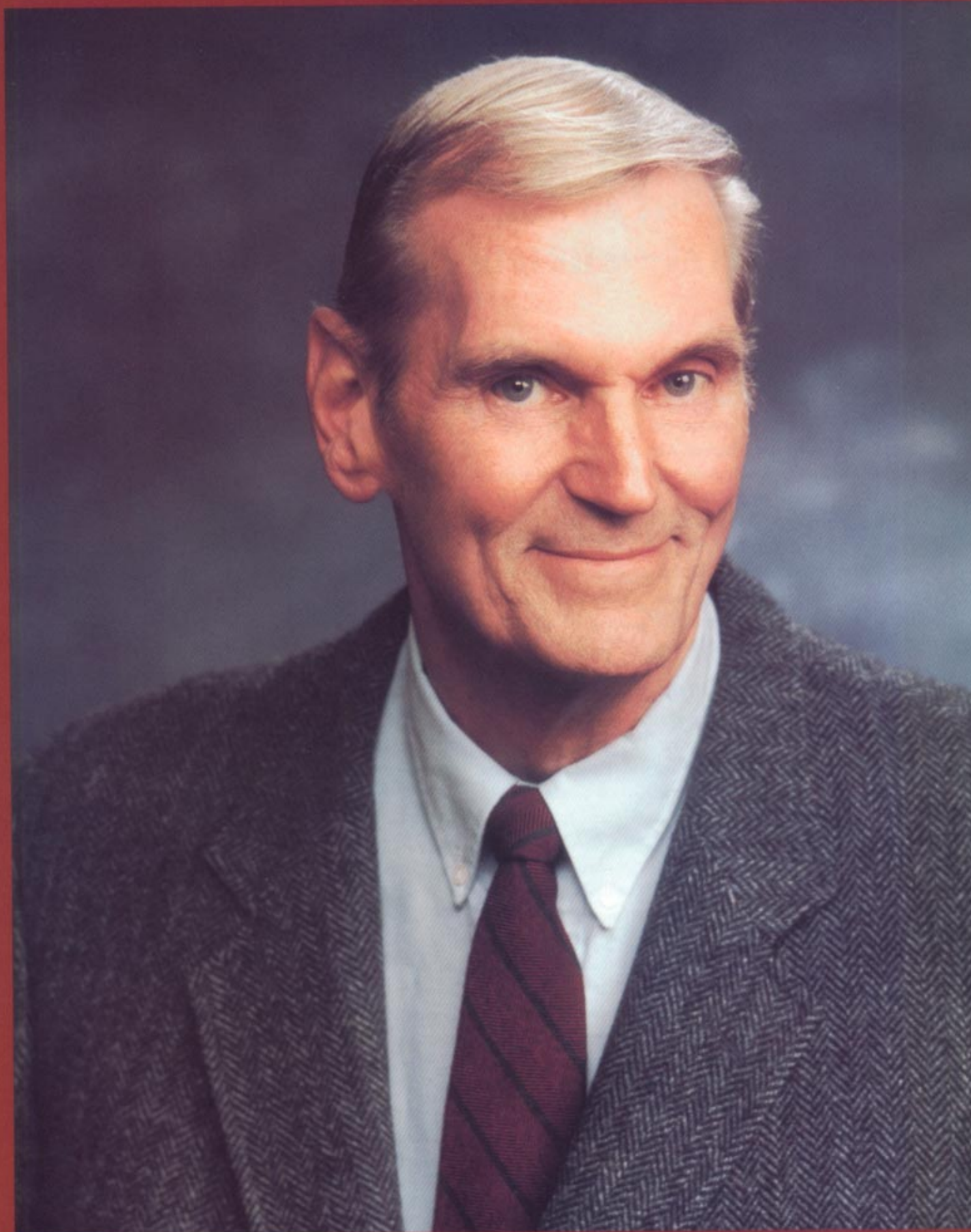
By Steven Ferry

It's been said a man is as rich as he has friends. If that's true, then Bruce Pottle was a very wealthy man.

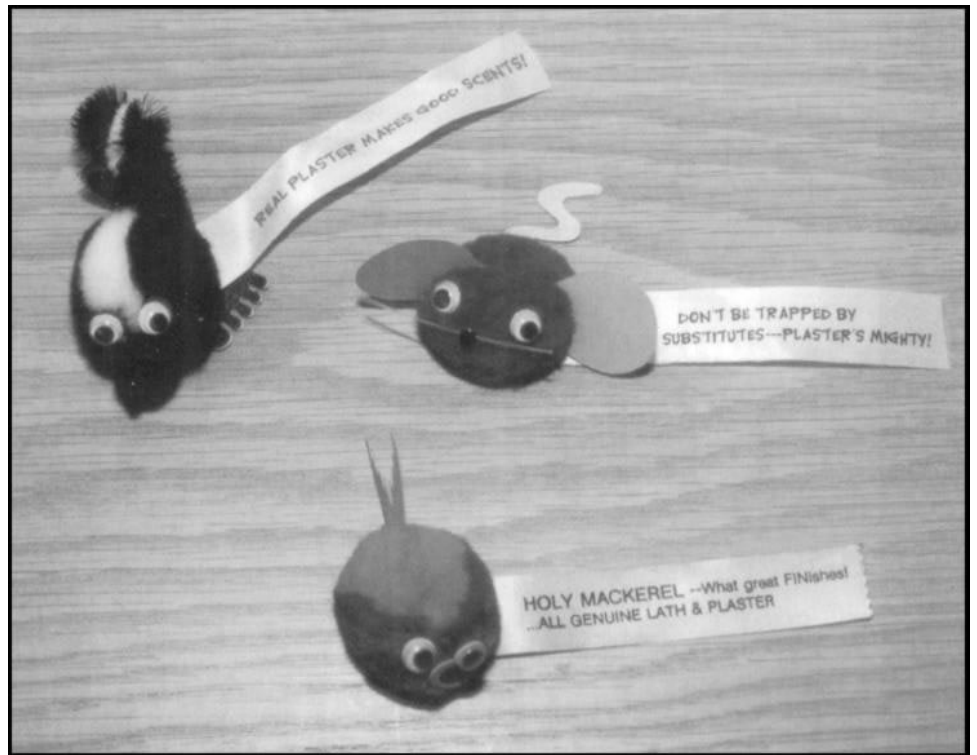
Pottle, who is known to many as one of the bulwarks of the lath and plaster industry, passed away Jan. 16 after a yearlong battle with cancer. He was 62, a genuinely great man who left us too soon.

His contributions to the industry were numerous. As Gary Maylon, manager of Technical Services at Alabama Metal Industries Corporation, points out: "Bruce was largely responsible for making Minnesota, his home state, into one of the most respected areas of the country for its quality of workmanship. He wouldn't allow second-rate work to be done in his area. He made ASTM C926 the document that it is today, re-writing and babying it through the committees until approved."

continued on page 36



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Pottle, continued from page 35

Pottle was an active member in numerous construction, trade, testing and code organizations related to the EIFS industry, including the EIFS Industry Members Association (where he contributed to the EIMA Industry Defense Fund and helped write the Class PB specifications for EIFS); Construction Specifications Institute; American Society for Testing and Materials (on C11 Committee); International Conference of Building Officials; the Producers Council Midwest, Inc.; Minnesota Wall and Ceiling Contractors Association; Minnesota Construction Management Association; and Minnesota Society of Association Executives. Pottle was also executive director of the Minnesota Lathing & Plastering Bureau for nine years and an officer in the International Institute for Lath & Plaster.

A request for a few words from his friends and associates resulted in a deluge that spoke volumes in itself.

Michael Gardner, director of code services for the Gypsum Association, recalls: "Bruce was a kind, friendly and helpful person. I felt very comfortable in his presence. When I began working with him, he took me under his wing, an endearing action that I will always be grateful for."

Steve Klamke was also lucky enough to receive Pottle's help when starting out as executive director of the EIFS Industry Members Association. "Bruce was the grand old gentleman of the plastering industry. The insight and expertise he offered me were inestimable."

"Bruce could also be stubborn, but in an endearing way," Gardner adds. "He always let you know where he stood on a subject, but he was enough of a gentleman to acquiesce to group opinion. At every national meeting, he invariably insisted that it was not necessary to cut metal lath behind stress relief joints, an opinion that ran counter to industry dictums. After making his point, he would let the group opinion speak, never being a sore loser."

Frank Nunes, executive director of the Lathing & Plastering Institute of Northern California, attended the funeral service in Minnesota, where more than 400 people paid their respects. "I came away realizing that Bruce's life was a mission, personally and professionally. The passion he had for the industry was to see things done well, with the people and industry prospering. He was hard working, diligent and caring. For instance, as a result of attending CSI conferences around the country, we would receive numerous calls from architects, federal agencies and bureaus, including some from areas that didn't fund CSI. Bruce cared enough about each

person that he expended much effort helping them, even though we, and he, had nothing to gain. It was important to Bruce to help others.”

Gary Maylon, manager of Technical Services at Alabama Metal Industries Corporation, knew Pottle for 10 years, initially through their association with ASTM in which Pottle represented MLPB. “Bruce was a man of great character, one of the most honest and hard-working individuals I have ever known. He stands head and shoulders above the crowd.”

Ron Wollard at CEMCO Corporation was friends with Pottle for eight years. “Bruce was a quiet, soft-spoken individual who had great presence. He never tried to be in the spotlight, but just went about his work diligently, working right up until the end. He was tenacious about what he believed was the right thing to do, never compromising his position. He was a real winner, a great man.”

Thomas Panek is president of the Minnesota Lathing and Plastering Bureau, where Pottle was executive director for nine years. “Bruce’s attitude affected hundreds of people in the world of construction. His enthusiasm and going the extra mile for all of us in the industry has set an extremely high level of professionalism. I marvel how Bruce could listen to both sides of an issue. He would research it and call or write back so that both sides were completely satisfied with the outcome. In today’s business world, honesty, reliability and fairness are sometimes lost to profitability. Bruce never compromised his ideals.”

Bill Schell, executive vice president of the Operative Plasterers’ and Cement Masons’ International Association, had similar words to say: “Bruce pushed for quality work, that things be done right and all contractors compete on a level playing field.

He represented a contractor organization, but he was always looking out for everybody, including the workers. He was a leader among men.”

Tim Conroy is still on the MLPB board of directors that hired Pottle in 1990 to promote the business in the state. He also remarked on Pottle’s even-handedness: “Bruce was an extremely optimistic, high energy, dedicated and loyal indi-

vidual who had a great following with the general contractors, architects and designers in our area. They felt very comfortable talking to Bruce as a neutral party whenever there were any disputes, problems or interpretations that needed to be answered. He was a technically sharp man who did a wonderful job of promoting our area, as well as promoting work for us as contractors.” As Panek observes, “With Bruce’s 6’ 6” stance, he could walk into a room or meeting and command immediate attention. If he was introducing or speaking on the subject of lath and plaster, everyone would be attentive to his electrifying enthusiasm and contagious smile.”

Nancy Strohmayer was Bruce’s office manager and saw him up close for many years. She provides additional perspective on Pottle’s character: “When Bruce first came to MLPB, his background was in lumber and he didn’t know much about lath and plaster. So he

quickly read every manual and book on the subject. Before long, contractors were coming to him for answers. He was never angry, always friendly, outgoing and positive about his job and life. The fact that he was back at work the week after his lung was removed shows how motivated he was.

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mysteriously appear on an architect's computer or on a secretary's desk. A duck weepul carried the slogan, "That darn veneer plaster. No quacks!" A frog weepul said, "Have we toad you lately? Don't forget to specify plaster." A graduate weepul had the slogan, "School building? Plaster's classy." He'd even take them to trade shows and stick them on people.

Pottle certainly had a sense of humor, as Maylon recalls, "Bruce was always doing something to lighten the moment." His favorite joke was, "So this horse walks into a bar and the bartender says, 'Why the long face?'" Strohmayer recounts how "every so often, he would tell it again and laugh and laugh. I told him it was a dumb joke, but he didn't care, he liked it."

"Bruce really cared about others, more than himself," Strohmayer adds. "For instance, he had a new desk brought in for me, yet if you looked in his office, he had made his own shelves and his working side table was a counter top set up between file cabinets."

"Bruce loved to grow roses. He would come into the office during the summer with fresh cut roses. Every time he walked by them, he would stop, inhale deeply and smile contentedly before continuing out of the door on the way to another appointment."

If Pottle's stature in the lath and plaster industry was great, his name in Minnesota hockey is legendary. Although Pottle's involvement in his community was extensive and time consuming, sitting on the boards and councils of no less than nine local organizations, from the Jaycees to the United Fund, his passion was teaching girls hockey.

"Bruce was a long-time hockey goalie," Gardner notes, "who had the biggest hands I've seen in my life—the size of catcher's mitts. Pottle played goalie at St. Paul Academy and the University of Minnesota in the early 1950s before earning a

baseball scholarship with the Gophers. He spent the last 16 years of his life coaching goalies in Minnesota. Two dozen of his players went on to play NCAA Division I hockey, one of them even becoming a scoring member on the Olympics team. "He coaches to your ability," says one protege, "working with you and not against you." "He would talk about the things I did right," adds another, "instead of dwelling on the negatives. He was steadfast in his support of me."

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Bather than let the lack of funds that he experienced as a boy in buying his own equipment, prevent his students from playing, Bruce would provide the equipment needed for the goalies each year. Such was Pottle's generosity and caring.

Panek sums up with these words about a larger-than-life man who, when asked how he was, would often respond, "Finer than frog hair." "Bruce Pottle has had a great impact on all of us in this industry. When a person can give you a handshake and truly mean it in today's topsy-turvy world, it is very special. Bruce Pottle was one of those special people." Charlie Stryker, the hockey coach at St. Paul United, adds, "... He gave everything of himself and asked for nothing in return."

Gardner feels the same way: "Bruce never, ever ceased to assist others and to promote the use of plaster on a local and a national basis. His presence will be truly missed in the industry."

Bruce Pottle is survived by his wife, Martha, five children and two grandchildren. 