LEGENDS
FROM THE HILL TO THE ATRIUM
A Tribute to the Men and Women Who Made It Happen

ISSUE 5
Ann and Arthur Bidwell
Sharing an American Dream
There are entrepreneurs — and then there are ENTREPRENEURS. The Bidwell family of Middletown defines the latter category. The Magnode Corporation is the Bidwell family’s American Dream — a successful, third-generation, family-owned business with a fourth and fifth generation waiting in the wings.

With facilities in Trenton and Indianapolis, Magnode is an aluminum extrusion, fabrication and finishing company. CEO and chairman of the board Art Bidwell Jr., and his late wife, Ann, raised their seven children just a block from the former Middletown Regional Hospital (MRH). Art, 85, has always taken an active interest in the hospital and urged his children to do so, as well. Art served on the hospital board of directors for 25 years, during which time the Joint Commission honored MRH with the first-ever Ernest A. Codman Award for achievement in the use of process and outcomes measures to improve organization performance. Art credits Carol Turner, then hospital COO and now president and CEO, as his mentor in this effort. Art’s son Joseph, currently Magnode’s vice
president, also served on the hospital board for 12 years, including six as chairman during the planning, construction and opening of the Atrium Medical Center campus.

The Bidwells have shared not only their time and business acumen with the hospital, but also have been generous donors to Atrium Medical Center Foundation. In the late 1990s, they established the Ann and Arthur Bidwell Surgery Center at Middletown Regional Hospital. The center played a significant role in the hospital’s garnering national Top 100 status in 1998 and again in 1999. Today, the surgery center is housed in its own building on the Atrium campus and continues to fill an important community need for access to outpatient surgery.

BACK IN BROOKLYN

In 1947, along with a handful of partners, Art Bidwell’s father, Art Sr., a foundry molder with only a 10th-grade education, founded the Magnode Corporation in Brooklyn, New York. The company manufactured magnesium anodes, which kept hot water heaters from rusting — thus the name Mag (magnesium) + node (anode). With the post-war building boom getting under way, timing was perfect.

The company’s first year, though successful, was marred by Art Sr.’s death in 1947. Despite their grief, the Magnode partners pressed on. Art Jr. took over leadership of the group and continued with plans to expand manufacturing to the Midwest, the hub of the company’s growing market. Art contacted chambers of commerce in the tri-state region. The most enthusiastic reception came from the Cincinnati chamber, which had five locales for Art to consider within a 150-mile radius of all the nation’s hot water heater manufacturers. The Trenton site was so well suited to Magnode’s needs that the company bought it the next day.
A LOVE STORY BEGINS

Around the same time, Art met Ann Farrell, a native of Old Forge, Pennsylvania, who was living in New York. A student at The Julliard School of Music, 22-year-old Ann regularly traveled on the same train as Art, 19, an industrial engineering student at Columbia University. He mustered up the courage to speak with her, and the rest was magic. After a two-and-a-half-year courtship, they were married in January 1951, a union that endured 58 years until June 2009 when Ann passed away at age 84. During her time at Julliard, Ann was the protégé of the leading female singer of New York’s Metropolitan Opera.

LIFE IN MIDDLETOWN

As the company continued to grow, Art and Ann busied themselves with their children and with work on behalf of the community. Ann served for many years as Magnode’s corporate secretary and remained a vital member of the company’s board of directors until her death. She was also a member of the boards of Middletown Fine Arts Center and the Middletown Symphony.

Ann took pride in her beautiful home and was active in her children’s education and extracurricular activities. She was very involved in St. Mary’s Catholic Church and then Holy Family Parish, as chairman of the parish council, Sunday school teacher, member of the choir and minister of the Eucharist. The Bidwell children attended Fenwick High School before going off to various colleges – including Xavier and Miami universities, St. Mary’s of Notre Dame and the Athenaeum of Ohio/Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary. As the children got older, Ann began substitute-teaching music at John XXIII School and coached especially talented students.

INNOVATION AT WORK

As time went on, Art and his partners recognized that Magnode’s future growth lay not with magnesium but rather aluminum. Construction of the U.S. highway system was creating a tremendous demand for bridge railing, safety barriers and other highway-related products made with this versatile metal. Shifting its focus to serve the new market, in 1967 Magnode announced a $2 million expansion and increased its employee base by 50 percent. When his one remaining partner retired in 1973, Art took over complete ownership of Magnode.
By this time, the demand for bridge railing and other road products was waning, thus challenging the Magnode team to find and develop new markets for the company’s aluminum products. Magnode began working for the US Department of Defense, designing and making gun turrets as well as lightweight aluminum containers to protect the delicate instrumentation inside missiles. In 1986, Art told the Middletown Journal:

_The success we have enjoyed is directly related to our innovation in developing ideas and the use of our technical expertise. In short, it is the talents and abilities of our people as problem solvers coming up with new and more effective ways for our customer to make his product more competitive, to make his operation more productive. That’s the Magnode philosophy._

Today, Magnode’s key markets are automotive, defense, consumer electronics and consumer durables. Through strategic diversification, integration of its supply chain, and the business savvy of a strong, united entrepreneurial family, the small company that started more than 65 years ago is now a $60 million enterprise with more than 200 employees. Despite this growth, the company still prides itself on treating employees like family and paying the highest wages and benefits in the industry.

In 1997, Martin Bidwell became Magnode’s president and chief operating officer, with Art stepping into the role of CEO and chairman of the board. Joseph and Kathleen (Gramke) also hold executive positions at Magnode in Trenton. Marianne (Walter) is director of human resources for the company’s Indianapolis operation, until recently run by Marianne’s late husband Anthony Walter, and their son Adam is a fabrication engineer there. Rev. Michael Bidwell serves as pastor at St. Teresa of Avila Parish in Cincinnati. Art III is a manufacturer’s representative for another aluminum extruder. John owns a computer software business in the Middletown area.
INDUSTRY LEADERS

Along with leading Magnode and raising a family, Art has made significant contributions to his profession as president of the Aluminum Extruders Council and chairman of the Extruded Products Division of the Aluminum Association. In fact, he and son Martin are the only father and son duo to serve on the Extruders Council. In addition to his long service on the Middletown Regional Hospital board, Art also chaired the Chamber of Commerce and sat on the Xavier University advisory board, the YMCA board and the board of directors of The First National Bank of Southwest Ohio.

Today Art divides his time between the family home in Middletown and a condo in Naples, Florida. Atrium Medical Center Foundation and health care in southwest Ohio are stronger today, thanks to Art and Ann’s generosity and the spirit of service and giving they’ve instilled in their family. With 19 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren waiting in the wings, the Bidwell dynasty is ready for the future. The American Dream continues.
This article is the fifth in a series of profiles celebrating the 2017 centennial anniversary of Atrium Medical Center (formerly Middletown Hospital and Middletown Regional Hospital). The series honors men and women whose civic-mindedness and genuine caring for others helped Greater Middletown grow and contributed to establishment of the first-class medical center the region boasts today.

Past Legends focused on:
Paul Galeese, Issue 1; E.O. Bauer, MD, and John L. Bauer, MD, Issue 2; Educating Our Caregivers, Issue 3; Russell L. “Rusty” Malcolm, MD, and Albert S. Malcolm, MD, Issue 4.