

2013 Walks of Life Honoree

Christopher M. Connor



Chris Connor recalls his first trip to Ireland in 1999. It was a one-day business trip and the chief executive of Cleveland-based Sherwin-Williams Company was on a tight schedule.

Halfway through the morning, his Dublin sales manager, Patrick Brynes, suggested they stop at a pub. Connor thought drinking during work hours was not an efficient way to get work done. When Brynes once again suggested they stop at a pub, Connor started to wonder if this was the way the sales manager's day usually went.

Finally at noon, Brynes again suggested that they stop at a pub. Connor told the sales manager that he would really like to gather the sales team together for a meeting.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, Chris" Brynes said. "They're in the pub waiting for you."

Thus was Connor's introduction to business in Ireland.

"You gain such an appreciation for the collegiality and warm spirit of the Irish when you're in their country" Connor said. "I've never walked out of an Irish pub without having made five new best friends."

The 56-year-old chief executive is looking forward to many more trips to Ireland now that Eaton Corporation, on whose board Connor sits, has taken over an Irish company and will hold many of its future board meetings on the Emerald Isle.

Connor's father, Michael James Connor, known as "Irish Mike," was senior vice president of marketing at Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. The younger Connor, a Walsh High School graduate, received his bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University. He then took a job at Meldrum & Fewsmith advertising agency handling advertising for Glidden paints.

Five years later he was lured to Sherwin-Williams as director of advertising for the paint store group. He rose through the ranks and now is chairman and chief executive of a company that employs 38,000 and distributes its products in 121 countries. The company's annual sales top \$9 billion.

Connor also is chairman of the Greater Cleveland Partnership and sits on the boards of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame & Museum, Playhouse Square Foundation, University Hospitals Health System and United Way Services of Greater Cleveland.

He and his wife, Sara, have three adult children: Daniel, Erin and Kevin. The family home is in Hunting Valley.