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Donor Profile: George and Tanya Ruff

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Although he spent considerable time doing business in Hawaii, the waves DePaul Life Trustee and real estate executive George Ruff (BUS ‘74) learned to ride had nothing to do with the ocean. Ruff, co-founder and senior principal of Trinity Hotel Investors, has weathered worldwide economic ups and downs through the years to achieve great success.

“I got a lot of breaks that turned out to be successful from a business perspective,” he says. “I think a lot of it stemmed from the fact that I got a break at DePaul.”

Ruff grew up in the Grand Crossing neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago and served in the Marine Corps after he graduated from high school. When he was discharged, he spent a short time working in one of the nearby steel mills. “I figured out that’s not where I wanted to go, that maybe something else would be better,” he recalls. Ruff enrolled at the two-year Loop College (now Harold Washington College) while working part time at an accounting firm.

Ruff’s first connection with DePaul was an instructor at Loop College who joined the accounting department at DePaul “and suggested that maybe I should get a four-year college degree and maybe I should go to DePaul. So I transferred over.”

Ruff remembers that the dean of the college, James Diamond, nearly expelled him because Ruff, who was working full time to support his wife and children, rarely attended class, relying on his readings to achieve his good grades. After promising to show up more, Ruff found class attendance paid off. Among the 20 or so instructors who taught the CPA exam review course was one, Ruff says, “who taught well enough that I was able to pay attention and pass the CPA exam on the first try.”

Ruff has been a generous donor and valued advisor to DePaul over the years. He helped establish the Real Estate Center and the Coleman Entrepreneurship Center in the Driehaus College of Business, and funded the George L. Ruff Endowed Scholarship Fund for the School of Hospitality Leadership and the George L. Ruff Endowed Chair in the Department of Real Estate, which has been filled since its inception by James D. Shilling, one of the country’s leading real estate educators and scholars.

Ruff has served on the Board of Trustees, as chair, vice chair and member of a number of university committees, and currently serves on the finance, philanthropy and physical plant and property committees. Ruff also serves on the advisory board of DePaul’s School of Hospitality Leadership, the executive committee of the Real Estate Center and the advisory council of the Driehaus College of Business.

Ruff, who has spent a lifetime investing in and renovating and repositioning hotels, feels a special concern for people experiencing homelessness. The George and Tanya Ruff Endowed Fund for the Institute of Global Homelessness, an international nonprofit with headquarters at DePaul, is helping to fund everything from advocacy and leadership development to strategic initiatives designed to reduce and end homelessness.

Ruff gives back to his alma mater in part because “I attribute most of my successes in life to the fact that I got a DePaul education.”