

'Man who saw the future before others did'

Drake International global human resources, recruitment firm founder Bill Pollock dies at 97; Asper School of Business core building bears name of U of M grad's Winnipeg-launched company



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The man who launched a global human resources firm from Winnipeg — and has been recognized as one of the world's longest-serving CEOs — is being remembered as a pioneer in his field.

Bill Pollock, 97, died in his Monaco home on Tuesday.

He leaves behind Drake International, a human resources and recruitment firm with offices in 14 countries and roughly 1,000 staff. With partners, the firm spans another 128 countries.



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Bill Pollock, once dubbed the world's longest-serving CEO, died Tuesday. He launched his career — and what would become Drake International — in Winnipeg and had a long relationship as a philanthropist with the University of Manitoba after graduating in 1949.

"He really was a pioneer in our industry," said Kevin Gill, president of employment agency Staffmax.

Gill recalled meeting Pollock through industry conferences. Pollock was already well-known: he and business partner Jim Shore popularized temporary staffing in Canada in the 1950s.

The pair created Office Overload in 1951; in the '80s, it transformed into Drake International. (Pollock told the *Globe and Mail* in 2004 he wanted a "crisp, clean quality name.")

Gill sought advice about expanding beyond Winnipeg, and outside Canada, from Pollock. The senior businessman had stretched his company into the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, Asia and Australia starting in the '50s. Some of Pollock's guidance: "Get a really good cross-border tax attorney," Gill said.

He called Pollock accessible and a "blue collar guy" who worked daily. In 2021, the *Australian Financial Review* named Pollock the world's longest-serving chief executive. Pollock was 92 at the time. (He retired from the role in 2024, but stayed on as board chair.)

Under Pollock's watch, Drake International created spin-offs considered forward-thinking for their time. ComputerPrep, a global computer training business, launched in 1985.

Pixion — in the early 1990s — invested in nascent video conferencing technologies.

Drake International continues to certify, assess and recruit for temporary and permanent roles.

"Bill (was) a visionary leader," said Karen Meredith, Drake International's chief executive. "He understood the power of technology and the power of people. And combining together those two, he was a man who saw the future before others did."

Drake International was among the first investors in global email systems and led the way in psychometric assessments. Meredith called Pollock a mentor during her 33 years at the company; she began in sales.

"He really devoted himself to seeing that people were able to achieve outcomes that they didn't even know was possible," Meredith said. "He was a highly curious person, always interested in learning."

He had "legendary" practical jokes and would sing karaoke without hesitation, Meredith said, adding he changed people's lives through his work.

His career didn't come without controversy: there was the mid-1990s, where Drake provided replacement workers during a dock workers' strike. Pollock told the *Globe and Mail* animosity had ended, and unions had generally accepted the staffing industry.

Pollock aimed to assist in off-shoring, or connecting clients with cheaper labour overseas, according to his 2004 interview with the *Globe*. He said his company was providing an essential service to firms wanting to survive in the international economy.

Some time during Pollock's tenure, the company's North American headquarters moved to Toronto from Winnipeg.

He'd reportedly been an entrepreneur since his student days. He started a profitable lawn care business while in university and added 22 staff before selling the enterprise.

Pollock was the son of Austrian and Polish immigrants, and the youngest of nine children. He was the first to enter university and did so on a scholarship.

He graduated from the University of Manitoba with a commerce degree in 1949. Thus began a long relationship with the post-secondary, said Vanessa Koldingnes, the university's vice-president, external.

In 1987, Pollock donated \$1.5 million to the Asper School of Business through Drake International. It was the biggest gift to Asper at the time — hence why the Winnipeg school's core building is named the Drake Centre.

Pollock volunteered on an early 2000s fundraising campaign for the university which ultimately raised more than \$230 million. It was the largest philanthropic campaign in Manitoba history at the time, Koldingnes said.

"He was really generous in ensuring that the university would be supported in being able to provide ... resources to future generations of students," she said. "He

really was such a tremendous volunteer, alumnus, philanthropist for the University of Manitoba.”

Pollock received a distinguished alumni award from the university in 1999. Koldingnes said she met the executive in his Toronto office around a decade ago. Even then, he had “so much energy (and) was so vibrant.”

Drake International has slated \$1 million for University of Manitoba business school scholarships in Pollock’s name. Details are being finalized.

Pollock was a mentor to fast-food mogul Jack Cowin and an original member of the Young Presidents’ Organization; he delivered a speech to Pope Paul VI through the entity. He’s remembered as an early advocate for women in the workplace.

Pollock died peacefully in his sleep, according to Meredith.

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