



Joan and Tom Connaghan outside their home in Palos Verdes Estates.

# Getting to know the neighbors

by Ed Pilolla

After working in a variety of businesses in the financial services industry over 40 years, Tom Connaghan had an experience that led him firmly into the world of retirement and volunteering.

His nine-month-old granddaughter needed a liver transplant, badly.

"It kind of changes your life," Connaghan said. "We're blessed everything worked out fine."

His granddaughter, Tatum Haggerty, is now 7 and doing just fine. She received her procedure Superbowl Sunday 2007 and recently sang the national anthem in front of 350 people at summer camp.

"We have a joke in the family: If you're sick or hurt, if you can't beat a liver transplant, then don't complain about it," Connaghan said. "It's also very sobering to spend a couple months around a children's hospital. It's not a happy hospital. Everybody there is seriously ill, little kids dying. It kind of gets you focused."

Since retiring in 2007, Connaghan has been

## Tom Connaghan finds community service following a global business career

focused on donating his time and expertise to good causes, and getting to know his neighbors Palos Verdes Estates. For 40 years, he owned a home on the hill but often lived elsewhere, including Luxembourg, London and Washington D.C.

"When I retired, I re-entered the community," Connaghan said.

That includes his current roles as president of the Palos Verdes Golf Club, president the Palos Verdes Breakfast Club and Chairman of the Board of the Providence Little Company of Mary Foundation.

The first couple things Connaghan got involved with upon retiring was as a school board member of St. Thomas the Apostle School in Los Angeles. He also joined the

board of advisors of Little Sisters of the Poor in San Pedro, a charitable organization that provides housing, medical support and food to the poor.

"Nothing was calculated. I shake my head and wonder how I got involved in this," Connaghan said.

"It just shows the void there is in volunteer organizations," he added with a laugh.

In fact, Connaghan's don't-take-yourself-so-seriously attitude has been one of the keys of his success as a manager.

He graduated from Bloomsburg University in his home state of Pennsylvania with an English Degree and went on to work for General Electric's space technology division, writing instructions that were easy to

understand. After a few years he left with a group of people who went into the computer-technology business, and struck out again a few years later with another group into the banking-software development business.

In 1972, the small company Centurex relocated from Washington, D.C. to Southern California. Connaghan's job was to write software for the Americard credit card system, which was the precursor to Visa.

Bradford National Corp. ended up acquiring Centurex, and Connaghan worked for Bradford until 1978 when he joined Security Pacific Corporation, one of the big banks at the time, which was eventually acquired by Bank of America. Connaghan worked in the securities end of the banking services division for a couple years before moving to Luxemburg as a consultant for an international bond-clearing house. When he was hired to run the company's global sales and marketing in 1993, he and his wife Joan, who he met in college, moved to London.

In London, the Connaghans learned to cook.

They lived across the street from a butcher shop that served many of the finest restaurants in the city. They both were inspired. Joan enrolled in Le Cordon Bleu culinary school while Tom dabbled in the kitchen after work, and has never stopped.

"As Tom retired, he was more interested in cooking and has taken over as my personal chef," Joan said.

The couple lived in London from 1993 until 1999 when one of Connaghan's co-workers was hired as chairman of the board of the Pacific Stock Exchange. He asked Connaghan to be the president of the unprofitable stock exchange, which was one of a handful of stock exchanges in the U.S. at the time (Today, there are 13).

Pacific Stock Exchange was ultimately sold to a technology company called Archipelago, which later merged with the New York Stock Exchange.

Connaghan worked as a special advisor to the new corporation, which meant it was nice glide path down to retirement because for a year he did nothing but be available if anyone needed him. And that worked out because his young granddaughter was soon in need of a liver transplant, and the family needed to come together.

Bill Salus worked with Connaghan at Security Pacific Bank and is also his brother-in-law. He said Connaghan brings a lot to the organizations he is now serving.

"Tom has a wealth of experience in business and around the world, and he can bring that perspective to boards and charitable organizations in retirement. I would say that in addition to his business experience it's his life experiences and his energy and compassion that really would separate him from being a leader in these organizations and in the community."

Jack O'Meara worked with Connaghan in London at the bond-clearing house.

"Tom was well regarded globally," O'Meara said. "He is a very congenial, likeable guy. But he could also talk nuts and bolts because he understood the nuts and bolts, and that's not often the case."

The liberal arts major who went on to work at General Electric in the space division said it was a different time back then.

"I think in the early point of my career you didn't have to be technically competent," Connaghan said. "You just needed to have a good business sense and good communication skills. People skills. And it turned out for me I was a good manager and a good motivator, and I got more enjoyment out of seeing my subordinates being successfully. I loved it to see them stay or leave and be successful."

Connaghan's success these days is his volunteer work, something his father also did, as the head of the St. Vincent De Paul Society for 62 years.

Although Connaghan, 72, is proud of his volunteering and professional accomplishments, and wine cellar, he's most proud of his three children and 11 grandchildren. "There's lots of joy and happiness there," he said.

As far as a philosophy of management, Connaghan said he admired the people-oriented approach of GE's Jack Walsh and Citibank's Walter Wriston.

"It was really putting together the right team and empowering them and motivating them and rewarding them," Connaghan said, adding, "And don't take yourself too seriously." **PEN**