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Charese Hill, editor

# Mourning a Leader, continuing the Mission

Al Baker retired as one of the most decorated soldiers in the U.S. Army of the Vietnam era, but to his colleagues at PIBH, where he served as president and CEO for 15 years, he was many other things as well—an inspiration, a supreme motivator, a blithe spirit, a father figure, and, above all, a man who cared.

“He was incredible to work for, and I am so blessed that I had the opportunity,” said Brenda Bonafair, vice president of customer sales and service at PIBH.

Al’s effectiveness was evidenced by the fact that PIBH’s sales tripled during his tenure. But despite his military background, he got results through understanding, empathy, and communication rather than the typical command-and-control approach.

“I have never [before] worked for a boss who convinced me 100 percent that he loved his staff,” said Susan McIntyre, regional operations manager of the Photo ID Program. “I’ve never seen a boss try as hard as Al did to make our working environment a happy experience. His style was to put people in the best position for them and then let them to their job with little interference. There was never a doubt that he was devoted to us and our well-being. His focus was to make this the best place to work in Pennsylvania.”

And that he did. Seven times during the past decade PIBH has been officially designated as one of the “Best Places to Work in PA.” And in 2003, PIBH was selected by the American Business Association as the best overall company in the nation and was a finalist five other years during the decade.

It goes without saying that Colonel Alfred W. Baker, U.S. Army Retired, will be missed. He died March 5, 2010, in Harrisburg Hospital. He was 69 years old but retained the vitality, passion, and nimble mind of a man much younger.

Al did three tours of duty in Vietnam and became an Army legend, working with and adopting the methods of military maverick John Paul Vann, who came to believe that building grassroots relationships with Vietnamese peasants was ultimately more important than firepower.

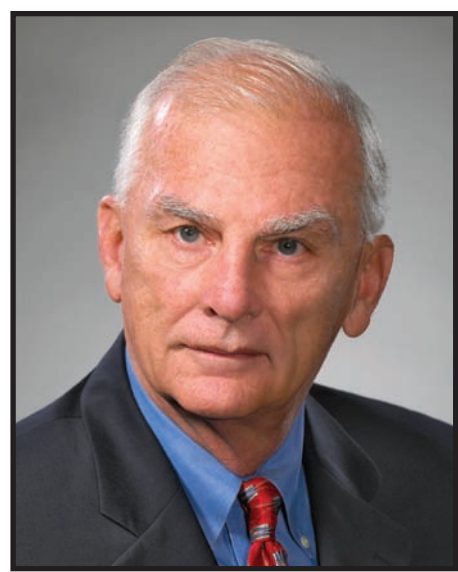
Al won four Purple Hearts in three years, one for being blown up in 1969 by a Viet Cong booby-trap, the recovery from which involved 15 operations. He also won two Bronze

Stars, a Silver Star, two Legion of Merit awards, and an Air Medal for his service in Vietnam.

In a 1994 profile of Al that appeared in *The Los Angeles Times*, Robin Wright wrote, “After Vietnam, Baker’s foreign postings reflected a determination to do right what Vann had failed to do in Vietnam. Baker hasn’t always succeeded. But he often made a difference.”

That Al Baker always tried to make a difference was a pivot point of his career.

During the 1980s he worked with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization mission in Lebanon. In an attempt to



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## Mourning a Leader

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build relations with leaders the Palestine Liberation Organization he often stayed with them in their guerilla camps. He made similar efforts to win the confidence of the Christian Militia by helping them build their local economy.

He had a second posting in Lebanon as chief of the Office of Military Cooperation, after which he was awarded the Order of Cedars by the president of Lebanon.

His third assignment in the Middle East was as chief of staff of the Sinai Force, a multinational force of peacekeepers established by the Camp David accords.

Those assignments, Wright wrote, gave him a chance “to practice the theme increasingly running through his life: how to get people to do things to overcome hatred and injustice by means other than force.”

He concluded his military career in Berlin in the early 1990s where he served as chief of staff and ultimately oversaw the dismantling of the Army's Berlin Brigade.

Al and his wife, Joan, were familiar with the Harrisburg area from a stint at the Army War College early in his career and decided to settle here after he retired from the military.

He viewed his work with PIBH as extension of the things he did in the military. “It's really no different,” he told an interviewer for *Harrisburg Magazine* in 2002. “There is a similarity of purpose and clarity in what you're trying to do. The enemy is just different. It's now ignorance and bias and apathy.”

Al was a true believer in the noble purpose of PIBH, once again trying to make a difference. “He really cared about people—he was always out to help the underdog,” recalled Tracy DeBlasio, a contract coordinator at the agency.

Susan Miduri, vice president of contracts and services, said, “It amazed me that someone who saw so much war and death could be so compassionate and kind.” What made Al special, she said, was “the way he made others feel [that] they were the special ones.”

Jeff Holt, state manager of the Photo ID Program, said, “He had a global view—the needs of others in many countries gave him the vision and audacity to stand up and insist that people work together for a common purpose of providing work for persons with disabilities.”

“It didn't matter what position you held here; he appreciated everything that everyone did,” Michelle Anson, special projects coordinator, said.

Colleagues saw Al in many ways. They saw him as a second father, a person who always had time to talk, a constant optimist, and an awesomely entertaining joke-teller and song-singer. Just beneath his engaging personality, though, lay what can only be described as a genuine humanitarian.

“I am honored to have had Al as my friend,” said Gary Crowell, who has succeeded Al as president and CEO. “He will be missed by all who knew him.”

Kim Cruz, vice president of administration and human resources, called Al a “unique, compassionate, and spirited” individual and said, “He brought from his military experiences the reality that life was short and unfair but should be enjoyed and we should all work hard to equal the playing field in employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.”

PIBH employees mourn the loss of a leader, she said, “but continue the mission with the things we have learned from Al.

## PIBH GUEST SPEAKER: LOU FERRIGNO

### Nettie Mann Achievement Award Dinner

June 8,  
2010



Lou Ferrigno is keeping very busy. He shot a wonder-

ful supporting role in DreamWorks romantic comedy “I Love You, Man”, which was directed by John Hamburg (Zoolander, Along Came Polly, Meet the Parents, Meet the Fockers), with a cast that includes Paul Rudd, Jason Segel, Jaime Pressly and Rashida Jones. He also appeared in, and did the voice of The Hulk, in the superhero blockbuster feature film “The Incredible Hulk”, directed by Louis Leterrier, with a cast that included Edward Norton, Liv Tyler, Tim Roth, William Hurt, and Robert Downey Jr. Lou also enjoyed his recurring guest star role on “King of Queens”, where he frequently appeared up through the show's successful 9th season, on CBS. Just prior, Lou guest starred on the ABC sitcom “My Wife and Kids”, and became the spokesman for the Sit Up-Sit Down Home Gym. He was the also the lead in the debut video for the band “Edgewater” for MTV.

In 2004, Lou appeared in the blockbuster hit feature film “The Hulk”, directed by Ang Lee. He also provides the voice for the UPN animated series “The Incredible Hulk”, with a cast that includes Peter Strauss, Mark Hamyl, Kathy Ireland, and Richard Moll. He was only 21 when he won his first Mr. Universe title, a Guinness Book record that stands to this day. More incredible, at age 22 he won again – and to this day remains the only person to win consecutive titles! Lou carried the world of bodybuilding to new heights and himself to superstardom with the film documentary, “Pumping Iron”, which chronicled the fabled exploits of the youngest and only person to ever become Mr. Universe twice in row! Exploding onto the film scene, with his place as a body building legend secured, Lou set out to do the same thing in film and television. In less than a year after “Pumping Iron”, Lou was again larger than life and created a new cult legend as the title character of the hit show “The Incredible Hulk”. The same hard work that crafted his six foot five inch, two hundred eighty five pound frame into a piece of human art, define him as an actor with the uncanny ability to assume characters of mythic proportions that carry a primal humanity.

## More about Al . . .

Al also was co-owner with his wife of RAE's Tobacco Shop in Strawberry Square. He was a native of Oak Hill, West Virginia. He is survived by his wife, Joan (Sewall) Baker; two daughters, Carrie L. Baker of Harrisburg and Jena Spearin of Virginia; four sons, Alfred W., Jr., James G. and Charles E., all of Texas, and Jason Grotuss of Florida; a brother, Joseph W., of Newport News, Virginia; 17 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

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## CONGRATULATIONS !! CONGRATULATIONS !!

Congratulations to the Cambria County Association for the Blind and Handicapped (CCABH) for earning recognition through the **2009 Boeing Performance Excellence Award - Gold Level** for achieving superior supplier performance. Cambria County Association for the Blind and Handicapped has maintained a Gold composite performance rating for each month of the performance period from October 1, 2008 to September 30, 2009.

There are 486 suppliers who achieved either a Gold or Silver level Boeing Performance Excellence Award. CCABH was one of only 128 suppliers to be awarded the Gold level of recognition. **Cambria County Association for the Blind and Handicapped is a member agency of PIBH.**

**It is required by Law that the Department of General Services perform Compliance reviews on many of PIBH's contracts.** The criteria which must be met for a successful review is the **Direct Labor Requirement** – The requirement that at least seventy-five percent (75%) of the personnel engaged in the direct labor related to Goods and Services in this Commonwealth must be persons with disabilities and the **Payment Requirement** – The requirement that at least 75% of the amount the Commonwealth Purchasing Agency pays for the Goods and/or Services be remitted to the Agency for Persons with Disabilities to cover Allowable Costs of the Agency For Persons With Disabilities in manufacturing Goods and/or performing Services. **To date 36 contracts have been reviewed for a total of \$43.7 Million and all were found to be in compliance.**

## THE CHAIRMAN'S CORNER



A little less than two years ago I wrote my first message for this newsletter as the newly elected chairman of the PIBH board of directors. It has truly been an honor to serve as the chairman of a board that daily displays a commitment to ensure that disabled Pennsylvanians experience the dignity of work through the sales of products and services to our commonwealth. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the board for their hard work, and support during my term as board Chair.

I would also like to thank the PIBH staff for their support and hard work and the fulfillment of our mission to market the products and services produced by our member agencies. In a world where the bottom line is often the measure of success, the leadership and staff of PIBH remains first and foremost dedicated to the employment of persons with disabilities.

Finally, I would like to thank the many customers throughout the state who purchase those products and services provided by PIBH member agencies. Through your continued support, thousands of disabled Pennsylvanians are afforded the opportunity to achieve personal and economic independence.

Although my term as chairman was filled with many fond memories, it is with great sadness that I mention the recent passing of Al Baker PIBH President and CEO. Al will be remembered for his many fine attributes, but for me, it was his unweaving commitment to ensuring that all disabled Americans should have the opportunity to work. Time and again, Al fought against those who would deny persons with disabilities the right to work, and for that we are all eternally grateful. So thank you Al, for your commitment, your many years of service to our country and to PIBH and most of all thank you for your passionate leadership.

Dennis Steiner  
Chairman



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