

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Iacocca molded by school teachers

Automotive giant Lee Iacocca died last week at 94.

Iacocca was the most famous graduate of my alma mater, William Allen High School in Allentown, and spoke at the commencement of my graduating class in 1966. By that time he had gained extraordinary fame as the creator of the Ford Mustang and later ascended to become president of the Ford Motor Co.

His immigrant father started a business selling hot dogs in the 1920s which is still going strong in Allentown, called Yocco's, which is how many Allentonians pronounced Iacocca.

Iacocca became a national hero after rescuing the Chrysler Corp. from bankruptcy in 1980. Two years earlier, Iacocca had been fired as president of Ford because of a personality conflict with Ford's chairman, Henry Ford. A few months later, Iacocca was named president of the Chrysler Corporation. Chrysler was so deep in debt it needed a \$1.2 billion loan guarantee from the federal government to keep operating.

After much controversy, Chrysler got the guarantee and made an incredible turnaround through the sale of innovative compact cars and minivans. The company's \$1.7 billion loss in 1980 became a \$2.4 billion profit by 1984, and Chrysler paid its

government loans back seven years early.

Iacocca had degrees from Lehigh and Princeton, but in his autobiography he credits his public school teachers for showing him how to communicate.

"If you ask me the names of my professors in college or graduate school, I'd have trouble coming up with more than three or four. But I still remember the teachers who molded me in elementary and high school," Iacocca wrote.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

"Miss Raber, our ninth grade teacher, had us turn in a theme paper of five hundred words every Monday morning. By the end of the year, we had learned to express ourselves in writing. Miss Raber started us on extemporaneous speaking. I was good at it, and as a result, I joined the debating team, which was sponsored by Mr. Virgil Parks, our Latin teacher. That's where I developed my speaking skills and learned to think on my feet.

"You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your brains won't get you anywhere.

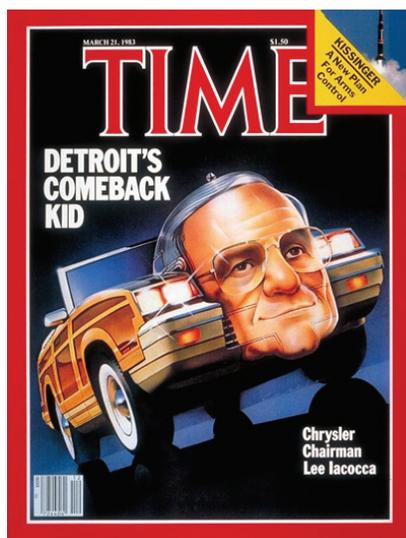
"By the time I was ready for college, I had a solid background in the fundamentals of reading, writing, and public speaking. With good teachers and the ability to communicate, you can go pretty far with those skills.

"Years later, when my kids asked me what courses to take, my advice was always to get a good liberal arts education. Although I'm a great believer in the importance of learning from history, I really didn't care if they mastered all the dates and places of the Civil War. The key is to get a solid grounding in reading and writing."

His influence survives his death.

Last Sunday, Iacocca's family published a full-page advertisement in the New York Times with his photograph and these words:

"All the success I've had, all the jobs I've saved and the lives I've influenced would never have happened if my parents had been turned away at Ellis Island."



**LEE IACOCCA** of Allentown made the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines multiple times and wrote a best-selling autobiography.