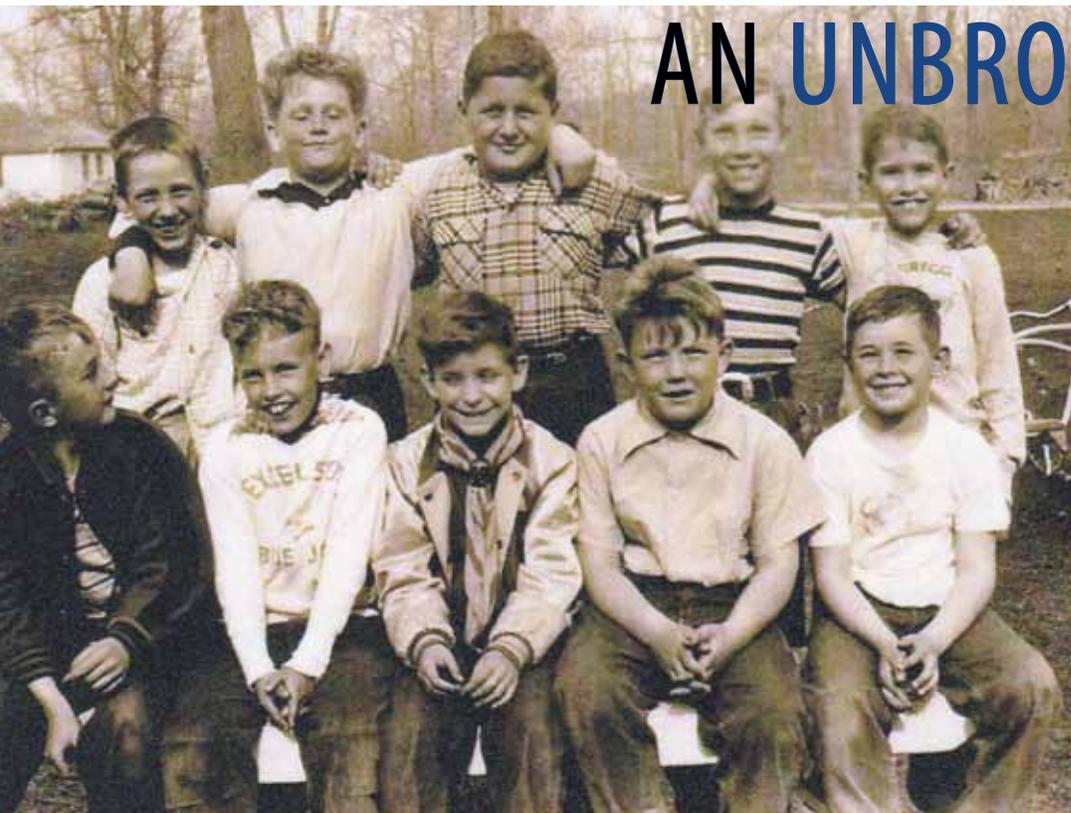


# AN UNBROKEN BOND

## The Naegeles

BY PAUL MOORE



Bob and Bill with their childhood friends in 1949. Front Row (left to right): George Johnston, Dave Elliott, Dave Johnston '59, Bill Naegele '60 and Al Tollefson '59. Back Row (left to right): Don Berlund, Bob Naegele '57, Doug Williams '56, Dave Wendt and Gregg Westigard '60.

If you want a good example of how things have changed over the past couple of generations, consider how Bob and Bill Naegele used to get to their summer jobs in Minneapolis when they were kids. They'd hitchhike. From Excelsior. Both ways.

Then again, the story of the Naegele brothers might not be all that different from others. Like so many families, the Naegeles grew up in the Minnetonka area and then returned to their hometown to raise children who also went on to Minnetonka High School.

But not every family has the history of the Naegeles. Health clubs, restaurants, Rollerblades, NHL hockey— and you can trace it all back to growing up in a small town: Excelsior.

"We did everything there," says Bill ('60) "It was a small, rural community where we knew everyone, and everyone knew us."

"It was a lark growing up in those days in that area," says Bob ('57). "Doctors made house calls. We learned to skate pushing a bench around Lake Minnetonka."

The boys' parents, Robert and Harriet Naegele, moved to the area in the early 1940s, (buying five acres on Lake Minnetonka for \$8,000) to raise a family that eventually included Bob, Bill and their sister Joan, who passed away in 1997. Robert Sr. ran Naegele Advertising, where both brothers worked part-time as kids and full-time as college graduates.

The kids went to Minnewashta Elementary, a three-story structure on the site where the current schools sits. There were just four classrooms of two grades each.

"Going to a small school like that, you get to know the kids in the grades ahead of you and the kids in the grades behind you," Bill says. "You form some real heroes in the school, those guys in seventh and eighth grade when you're in second or third."

The small-town setting continued into junior high, where

Bob found himself sitting near a pretty classmate named Ellis. "It was in Miss Beach's homeroom, in September of 1951 at Excelsior Junior High when I was in 7th grade," he says. They were married ten years later and will celebrate their golden anniversary next year. Did he know that day in 1951 that this was the girl he'd marry? "I didn't, but I think she knew about a year later," he chuckles. "Guys are the last to know."

High school found the Naegele brothers in just about every activity there was: tennis, football, hockey, theater, choir, student government.

"My brother was an incredible football player," says Bill. "MVP of the Lake Conference on a team that won only two games." Both brothers fondly recall a huge win against powerhouse Edina in 1956. Bill says Bob's two punt blocks keyed the comeback victory; Bob spreads the credit around, however. "Every guy stepped up in that second half to do his part," he says. Either way, it's become a favorite family story. "His grandkids get tired of hearing that one," Bill laughs.

Being so involved in high school led to bonds still unbroken today. "The relationships you forge in high school are lifelong," says Bill. "Even though you may not see one another all the time, when you do, you kind of pick up where you left off and the friendships are deeper."

For college, both Naegeles stepped outside the close-knit comfort of the Minnetonka community, Bob to Dartmouth

**"The relationships you forge in high school are lifelong."**

and Bill to the University of Minnesota. After college each worked for the family business, Naegele Advertising, in different cities across the country, then took their dad up on an offer to buy the Twin Cities arm of the company.

“Our dad was selling the company in pieces by city,” says Bob. “So, in 1971, we became the proud owners of Naegele Outdoor in the Twin Cities. We paid off the debt in about five years. I can remember walking in with the last payment, giving Pop the check and saying, ‘You don’t have to sign for us anymore.’”

Which is how Bob and Bill Naegele ended up back in the community where they grew up. After each sold his portion of Naegele Outdoor in the ‘80s, Bill found himself drawn to the restaurant and health club businesses, where he helped develop such familiar establishments as Lord Fletcher’s, the Amalgamated and Pracna on Main.

Bob recognized a good idea when he saw one and bought the first inline skate company from its founder. Rollerblade turned out to be a pretty good investment.

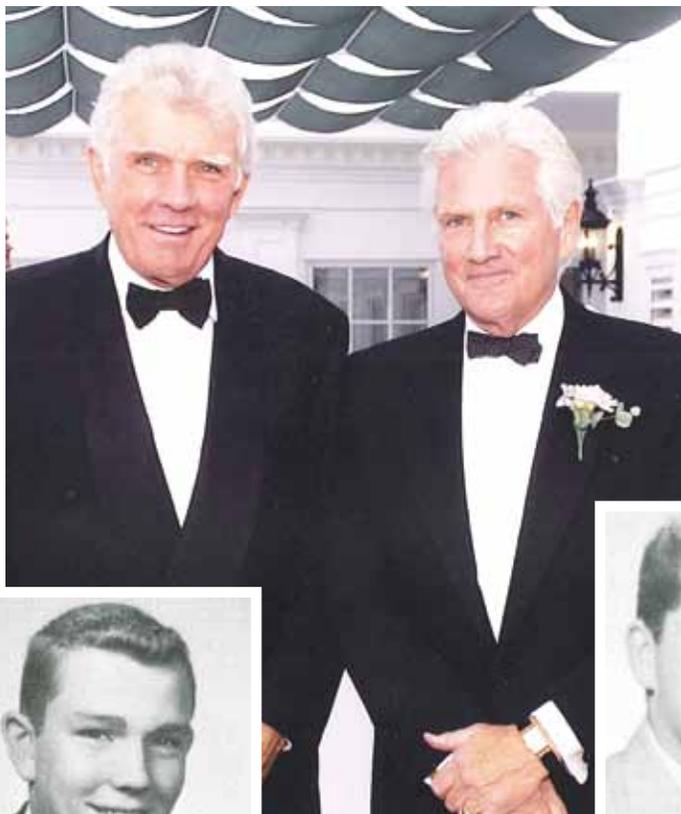
Another of Bob’s investments played into his lifelong love of hockey. One summer his son arranged for him to meet with then St. Paul mayor Norm Coleman, who had some ideas about bringing the National Hockey League back to Minnesota, specifically, St. Paul.

“When I was at Naegele Outdoor, St. Paul had been my beat and I knew the heart of the people and the heart of the city. I knew the passion for hockey,” Bob says. “And to me St. Paul was always a natural; it had just never been called to the party.”



## CELEBRATING 50 YEARS - MHS CLASS OF '60

Bill and his 1960 classmates will celebrate their 50-year Class Reunion this summer. Pictured above: Class Officers Dotty Bacon Miller, Historian; Bill Naegele, President; Judy (Bondus) Boecher-Frey, Secretary; Phil Carr, Treasurer; and Mike Liemandt, Vice President.



Bill (left) and Bob (right) Naegele.



So Bob used his contacts, his experience and the wisdom of a successful career in business to become majority owner of the Minnesota Wild.

“It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience,” he says. “And it was intense.” The tension increased when a work stoppage wiped out the 2004-05 NHL season. “A very harrowing experience. No income, yet you still had 85 percent of your expenses. I said we’re gonna make it through this. I don’t know how, but we’re gonna make it through this.”

They did make it through, with the Wild thriving when play resumed. Bob eventually sold the team in April 2008.

Of course, it wasn’t all business for the Naegeles. Bill and his wife Stephanie have two children, Bill, Jr. (’87) and Heather (’91). Bob and Ellis have four children, Jennifer, Jill (’81), Bob, Jr. (’84) and Tricia (’86).

“It’s a delightful place to raise your children,” says Bob. “Minnetonka is composed of so many social and economic strata. You could be going to school with a bus driver’s kid or with the son or daughter of a Cargill executive. It was a great learning experience for the kids to know, have fun with, and play sports with folks from all different backgrounds.”

“I think knowing that we’d grown up in Minnetonka was a comforting thing to our kids,” says Bill. “It gave them a connection to the community.”

For Bob and Bill Naegele, Minnetonka is a thread that runs through successful business ventures, loving marriages and wonderful memories of both being children and raising them. It’s a 70-year connection that started simply enough when Robert and Harriet Naegele decided to buy that place on the lake just west of Excelsior.