

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Connelly speaks at annual banquet

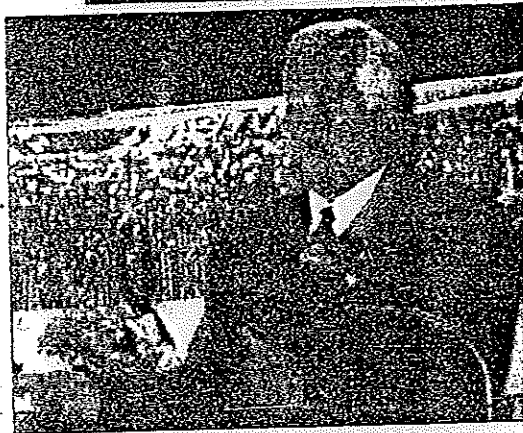
EAST LIVERPOOL — "It's not what happens to you, it's what you do about it that matters," was the theme shared with the audience at Saturday night's Tri-State Promoters annual banquet by guest speaker Jim Connelly.

It was a message Connelly himself has lived his life by. The son of an alcoholic, abusive father in the projects of Turtle Creek, Pa., he began as a paper boy at age 7 and worked his way through a succession of jobs to become the No. 1 performing investment banker for Shearson Lehman.

He also has devoted a large portion of his life to the recovery of Donna Jones, a friend for whom he was acting as a mentor before she suffered a severe injury in a snowmobiling accident in 1985.

Connelly's message applied as well to the Tri-State Promoters, an organization founded 36 years ago by Elizabeth Carter and educators Ruth Kin-

By **MIKE MCKINNEY**
Review Staff Writer



Former investment banker Jim Connelly provided an inspiring message of overcoming adversity to succeed both in business and as a person at Saturday night's annual banquet of the Tri-State Promoters. (Photo by Mike McKinney)

caid and Ann Johnston. The Promoters are a volunteer organization committed to taking positive action to make a difference in the lives of others less fortunate.

The story of Connelly's life provided an inspiration for anyone who struggles to overcome obstacles placed in their path. He said he decided when he was 7 to make a better life for himself after he spent a cold winter evening delivering papers for a friend. When he went to see his friend and to be paid, the other boy wouldn't let him in his house and told him to come to an outside window. The boy then threw him a nickel from about 10 feet away which Connelly didn't catch.

"I had made a decision that I was never going to be in a position that somebody was flicking a nickel at me and didn't care whether I got it or not," he

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said defiantly.

His ambition led him to get his own paper route and to eventually take on more routes that he subcontracted out, selling thousands of papers a day. But life at home and in the projects led to minor scrapes with the law, and Connelly found himself going to the Army instead of going to jail.

After he returned home, Connelly went to California and landed a job as a desk clerk at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, the lowest rung on the organizational ladder.

"When things aren't going your way," Connelly said, "what do you do about it? I had this enormous need to achieve."

He set about to become the hotel manager, working overtime for free, taking no vacations and learning the business, earning the confidence of management and even, he said proudly, outworking the owner. In six years, Connelly was, indeed, manager of the Beverly Wilshire Hotel.

His performance and the contacts he made in business and entertainment brought him to the attention of Shearson Lehman, who hired the then-28 year old as an investment banker and sent him to train at the New York Institute of Finance. Admitting that he was "terrified," the former five-year high school student and the first non-college graduate hired by the firm listened to tapes at night and on the subway and graduated in the class's top 1 percent.

Connelly then returned to Los Angeles and quickly became the company's No. 2 producer nationwide. Not content, he set his sights on No. 1. He eventually achieved this position, along with doing "other things," he told the audience.

These other things included founding a firm called International Leadership which provides training to corporations, beginning another company called Integrated Communications Services with his son, and after meeting Lou Holtz several years ago, even became a trustee of the Lou Holtz/Upper Ohio Valley Hall of Fame. Connelly lives today on the edge of the University of Notre Dame campus with his wife and daughter.

Connelly "got there," he said, with "passion, good luck and hard work."

"It all starts with a vision and a couple of people believing in you and a work ethic and commitment," he said — as well as gaining the respect of those you work for.

But Connelly also moved the audience with the story of Donna Jones, a young corporate salesperson he was mentoring who sustained a severe head injury in a snowmobiling accident 16

years ago and spent 48 days in a coma. Connelly, who said he considers Jones a dear friend, committed himself to helping her recover when doctors and even her family planned to have her institutionalized. He said he asked the doctors to give him a year, and they advised him to give up after three months of helping her with physical therapy.

Connelly, however, applied his own business logic to the situation — something bad happened, he said, but what are we going to do to help Donna get better.

Today, she lives a physically active life and runs, bikes and swims. While short-term memory problems prevent her from working, Connelly said after the dinner, this too is improving.

His work with Jones is chronicled in a book, "One More Sunset."

"The message is never give up and don't listen to anybody," Connelly said. "Follow your heart, follow your dream, follow your passion."

He also preached generosity of spirit. Even if someone is a multi-millionaire, he said, "the selfish person is never happy." To back up his words, Connelly, a past donor to the Tri-State Promoters, donated \$1,000 toward the Promoters' Thanksgiving dinner.

Frank Dawson reflected on the positive work over 30 years done by the Tri-State Promoters. "But it's important to reflect the keyword this organization stands for," Dawson said, "and that's love."

Because of the work done by Carter and her husband Richard, "there will always be a Point of Light in the East End of East Liverpool," Dawson stated.

Richard and Elizabeth offered their own brief reflections. "If you have some kind of idea in mind, never give up on it," Richard Carter said. "You never see a dead fish going upstream."

Elizabeth Carter paid tribute to the many volunteer individuals and organizations who by their time, talents and donations, "sponsor" the work of the Promoters. "Everybody is somebody," Elizabeth Carter said. "Without you, this wouldn't have been successful."

She recognized many in the audience, including Ergon, Von Roll Waste Technologies Industries and Dawson for their support.

Certificates and gifts were presented to volunteers Jean Baxter, Betty Dorsey and Ila Horger for their many contributions over the years. Also recognized, but unable to be present, were Marie Hayes and Lucille Prince.

Entertainment was provided by the Blue Sensation show choir from East Liverpool High School, under the direction of Lisa Ensinger. The group earned a standing ovation for their accomplished and heart-felt renditions of such selections as "God

the Candle Burning" and "God Bless the U.S.A."

Other musical selections including "I Ain't Complain," and an emotional "God Bless America" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" also were offered by Jeanette Coffee and Nolan Harmon.

The invocation and benediction were delivered by Rev. Ron Britte, of Lee Chapel in Wellsfalle.

The evening, held at the Point of Light Cultural and Entertainment Center, was emceed by Maureen Aronoff and Gina Gultz. Aronoff reminded the audience of significant upcoming events hosted by the Promoters — Thanksgiving dinner on Nov. 22 at the Point of Light Center with meals taken to shut-ins, a total expected to be 1,500, she said, with the same meal service offered on Christmas. She spoke of the music and good manners lessons offered for children and the snacks for children and clothing for those in need every day. A food pantry operates every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, she said.

"If there's anyway for anyone to dig a little deeper," Aronoff said, "our needs are great here at the Tri-State Promoters."

But the evening proved that while the needs may be great, there are many committed individuals and organizations willing to give of their time, talents and money to help accomplish the organization's goals.

For Elizabeth Carter, a woman of deep faith who always says she believes God will provide, there is one simple, guiding philosophy — "the answer is love."