

Charles “Chuck” Barancik’s

version of the American Dream includes a streamlined, no-nonsense attitude toward business and the belief that loyalty has a value far greater than any tangible asset. Starting his career as a Chicago-area CPA, by 1965, Barancik, along with his wife Margery and their three children, made his first foray into private, family-held enterprise, purchasing and turning around the Justrite Manufacturing Company. At the time of the acquisition, the struggling Justrite was doing little more than \$1 million annually selling carbide lamps and fire-prevention equipment. At its sale in 1994 to Federal Signal, Justrite had grown more than 30 times over, achieving \$32 million in annual volume. Earnings and cash distributions to shareholders over each of the last 10 years of ownership were in excess of 15 percent of sales.

Justrite was only one of many companies the Baranciks purchased and grew over the years. Charles devised a winning strategy of hyper-operating discipline to bring companies out of debt, coupled with generous rewards for top-producing managers. Notable Barancik turnarounds include Mayline (\$80 million annual sales), sold to Robert Baird Venture Capital in 2007, and Hamilton Industries (\$130 million annual sales), sold to Fisher Scientific in 1992, both deals closing with surplus cash on the balance sheets. To retain talent, Barancik paid out at least 25 percent of annual pretax earnings in bonuses and statutory maximum of profit-sharing fund contributions. Many of Barancik’s top managers had been with him for more than three decades. All operating companies have been sold. A Chicago-area family office is staffed with key people who have been with the Barancik family for over 30 years.



*Charles and Margery Barancik,
Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota County's Newtown Estates ribbon cutting*

As success came to them, Charles and Margery began vacationing with their children in Sarasota. Twenty-five years ago, they became residents of Longboat Key where they spend seven months a year. Long known as major Southwest Florida philanthropists, in 2014, the couple funded the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation and moved it to Florida. It is now one of Sarasota's largest private-family foundations, distributing and directing more than \$10 million annually in grants and initiatives. The Barancik Foundation supports more than 50 organizations including Jewish Family & Children's Service, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Sarasota County Schools, University of Florida Innovation Station of Sarasota, Ringling College of Art and Design, Mote Marine and Aquarium, and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. The Foundation also created and endowed the Barancik Prize for Innovation in multiple sclerosis research.

This interview has been edited for clarity.



What are the origins of the Barancik Foundation?

Barancik

We've had a family foundation since 1986. We used it on and off for tax purposes, but it's been largely dormant for three decades. In April 2014, we funded it with \$100 million and chartered it in Florida because we're residents here. It has been a whirlwind ever since.



Why wasn't the Barancik Foundation active in the past the way it has been since 2014?

Barancik

I wasn't ready to fund it. My family's security has always been key for me; now, my wife, children, and grandchildren are provided for. I'm 88 and the timing is right to set down my final estate planning. We chose to give the remainder of our estate to the foundation.



You hired Teri Hansen, former president and CEO of Gulf Coast Community Foundation, last year to head the Barancik Foundation, a notable appointment because of Hansen's longstanding leadership in the Southwest Florida philanthropic community. Why is it important to have staff?

Barancik

The way we ran our industrial companies, I never micromanaged. I'm a firm believer in giving people latitude. My philosophy is when you have good people, you get out of their way 95 percent of the time. But picking management is extremely important—organizational strength flows from the top. I wanted someone who could fulfill our family's vision and knew Teri and her record. None of the younger generations in the family has much experience in this area, so we needed an experienced person to get the foundation off the ground and its structure in place.



What have you done to ensure your foundation's mission and legacy?

Barancik

I've set the foundation in motion while I still have my marbles [laughs]. The bylaws are the first line of defense against someone distorting

our vision. Supermajorities are required to change certain key bylaw provisions. We have a mission statement and guidelines that require supermajorities to amend. It's important to have non-family members on the board, but sometimes it is descendants only who can weigh in on certain things. Professional legal help with the estate planning and the funding of the foundation was essential.



How long did it take to write the Barancik Foundation's bylaws?

Barancik

Not long at all—a couple of weeks. But they're evolving, and we keep coming up with additions as time goes on. Our internal grant guidelines name five different areas of primary interest (education, humanitarian causes, arts and culture, environment, medical research/resources). However, there is no set percentage allocation for how money should be distributed to those areas. We don't want this foundation to be bound in that way. Organizations that we support can fall from grace. Others can rise from the ashes. It's important to have flexibility to stay abreast of changes.



What would you like people to think when they hear the name Barancik Foundation?

Barancik

That our foundation's support gives an organization or initiative a “good housekeeping” seal of approval. We're very careful in our decision-making. We don't want to be involved with controversial subjects, and [we] avoid the partisan political arena. The foundation should be a source of enjoyment and fulfillment for our family. We create grants and initiatives where we see a need, as well as fund existing organizations.



There are others who could fund foundations at this level and don't. What's important to you about giving back?

Barancik

Early in my career, I started with no capital, worked very hard, and philanthropy was not in my mind. My first exposure to it was [through] my children. All three spent considerable time in public service starting in high school. I never once suggested they do it—it was completely voluntary on their part. And it utterly opened my eyes. Our focus at the Barancik Foundation is to make a difference and raise the standard of living of others. It's deeply gratifying when it happens.

WP

You support programs here in Sarasota but also in the Tampa area and Chicago. How does the Barancik Foundation decide where it will operate?

Barancik

We are Sarasota-centric, but we do give some support to the Tampa area because we have family there. Some of our grants involve Manatee County and the peripheral areas of Sarasota where there are many opportunities to have an immediate effect. Chicago's too big for us to make a difference. We support the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind because I had a severe visual problem and the doctor who saved my sight was a former CLB president. I've been going to the Ravinia Music Festival (summer home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) in the Chicago suburbs for over 60 years and support a concert there every year. But those two are isolated cases.

WP

Have you brought your business philosophies to the operation of the Barancik Foundation?

Barancik

We have always operated in lean fashion at our home office in Illinois. When issues come up, they are resolved immediately. No long speeches—instead we get right down to brass tacks. We're entrepreneurial, efficient, and lean. I think it was an eye-opener for Teri to see how we operate. There was an indoctrination process; now she's operating in this fashion, too.

WP

How will the foundation handle your eventual absence?

Barancik

I don't think there's going to be any surprises. We know our people well and they know my vision for the foundation. We are carefully shaping the DNA of the foundation so that the core beliefs will prevail and stand the test of time.

WP

How has the Barancik Foundation been received in Sarasota?

Barancik

Very well, I think. Our early grant awards are making a meaningful difference and the community appreciates our impact. For example, we helped launch the Newtown Estates Boys & Girls Club, providing a safe and nurturing after-school environment for 150 youth. We are seeing gains in academics and behavior, and many parents are able to find employment or extend their hours because their child is being cared for in the afternoon.

WP

Is it hard to say no?

Barancik

Very hard. Particularly when it's a friend.

WP

What would be a “dream” organization for your foundation to support? What's the character of the organizations you extend grants to?

Barancik

There's no single “dream” organization. But I admire the ones that are creating initiatives. Creating initiatives is the fun part, particularly if there is an immediate or near-term impact. When we fund initiatives, we often have professionals evaluate them at the end of each year to make sure that they're on target and living up to expectations. We value the independent perspective of professional evaluators.

WP

What's a good measure of return on investment, once the Barancik Foundation offers support to an organization?

Barancik

In a perfect world, an initiative has to be sustainable and affordable, it has to have an impact within a reasonable period of time, and it has to have an exit strategy. We're in one initiative right now that is going to have an exit strategy, and that is the ultimate. If you can withdraw your support and the initiative goes on, you've created something, and it's going to grow internally without your help. Then you know you've made an affirmative change for the better in people's lives.