

H. Victor Grohmann

January 3, 1903 — November 27, 1981

H. Victor Grohmann graduated from the School of Hotel Administration in 1928 and was an ardent supporter, friend, and contributor to Cornell and the hotel school for the rest of his life.

Vic's accomplishments and involvements over the years since graduation have truly been legendary among hotel school graduates, and a discussion of him and his efforts on behalf of the school was to be expected whenever Hoteliers gathered. He personally helped hundreds of graduates in job searches; in fact, his interest in assisting fellow alumni, young and old, resulted in the establishment in New York City of a placement service for hotel school graduates. He provided the office space and paid for the salaries and administrative costs associated with this office for thirty-five years, in addition to giving thousands of hours of his own time.

Professor Grohmann taught for forty years at the School of Hotel Administration, including the Center for Professional Development sessions during the summer periods. He was the first Howard B. Meek Visiting Professor and was able to teach and to counsel students with an intense commitment that was truly extraordinary, considering his other interests and responsibilities.

Vic liked teaching and was very impressed with the students he met over the years. They, in turn, appreciated being taught by an active, successful businessman. Vic's ability to combine careers and to be accepted as a very successful, contributing member of each group was one of the most remarkable aspects of his personality. He was always able to get things done. His willingness to help others was so ingrained that he took it for granted that others would also want to help worthy causes. Without Vic's telephone calls to general managers of hotels situated where Cornell athletic teams needed lodging, the Athletic Department budget would have had to bear thousands of dollars more in lodging costs.

Vic always felt he owed a great debt to Cornell. He had transferred from Rutgers to study agriculture but soon became interested in the curriculum offered by the School of Hotel Administration and switched his course of study. His interest in entrepreneurial activities can best be described by a note from him: "My last two years I worked in the student union, and I sold programs at athletic events, cereal, stationery, flowers, and used cars. I was holding so many jobs, when I graduated and got a nine-to-five position, I didn't know what to do with all the time off."

After graduation he worked in several hotels but always had a yearning for creative work. He therefore switched jobs and joined an advertising agency. Just a short while later, in 1931, he and a coworker decided to open their own agency. The fact that the country was in the throes of a deep depression didn't deter them; they believed the agency of Needham and Grohmann would have something special to offer clients. The agency grew steadily and has for many years been one of the preeminent agencies in the hotel, resort, and travel field. Housed at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, in New York City, it has long represented Rockefeller family properties such as Rock Resorts and Rockefeller Center, in addition to some of the most prestigious hotels in the world.

His identification with Cornell was constant throughout his lifetime. He was the founder and first president of the Cornell Club of Bergen County, he was president of the Cornell Club of New York, and he was president of the Cornell Society of Hotelmen.

Vic's devotion to his alma mater and his willingness to do so much was brought to bear as a member of the University Board of Trustees. He served ten years on the board and was awarded the Presidential Cornell Medal for distinguished service.

A brief statement of Vic's accomplishments in areas other than his business and Cornell activities may serve to assist H. Victor Grohmann's many friends and associates to fill in their own portrait of this remarkable individual. He was a trustee of the United States Travel Data Center and chairman of the United States Travel Data Fund. He served on the board of Discover America Travel Organization for twelve years and was an official of the American Hotel and Motel Association. In addition to his other activities, Vic always found time for local community affairs and served on an amazing array of committees. He was president of the Community Chest in New Jersey, chairman of the Tenafly, New Jersey, Senior Citizen's Housing Committee, and a member of the Mayor's Advisory Committee.

Many readers may associate Vic more with sports than with any of his other activities. He was certainly deeply committed to sports, both as a participant and a fan. He played football in high school and swam at Rutgers. When he transferred to Cornell, he played football, and since there was no swimming team, he organized one and acted as coach. He later played semiprofessional quarterback and halfback for the Atlantic City Tornados. Vic served on the athletic board at Cornell and spent many years with promising high school athletes, extolling the virtues of a solid education at Cornell. Among those he recruited was Ed Marinaro, who went on to all-American and professional football fame.

Vic was a fine, forthright gentleman who believed in hard work and commitment and who adhered to principles that some may regard as traditionally, perhaps uniquely, American. At his retirement gathering—at age seventy-eight—he said of his life, “It’s really been the American dream.”

He is survived by his wife, Margaret Elizabeth (née Haver), of Sussex, New Jersey; a daughter, Gwendolyn DesCognets ‘56, of Lincoln, Massachusetts; and two sons: H. Victor Jr., of Lakeville, Connecticut, and William, of Amherst, Massachusetts.

Robert A. Beck, Vance A. Christian, Paul L. Gaurner