

# Edward Netter

## The philanthropist's journey

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Edward Netter of Stamford has built a successful career in finance as chairman of Independence Holding Company and as chairman and CEO of Geneve Corporation, but his greatest achievements may have been made in education and cancer gene therapy.

Netter was born in White Plains, N. Y., one of three boys.

He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1953.

When Netter first graduated from college, he was studying to be an actuary at Metropolitan Life, where he encountered a supervisor who was planning on staying in his position because it was easy. A lesson he would be able to use later in life.

"It goes on like that day after day," said Netter. "That's the mode of most people, they think how do I do something, but often to change isn't so easy."

After working his way into the financial industry, Netter became a principal in a Wall Street firm. He continued to build his professional abilities becoming an expert in investments, insurance and securities.

"I was pretty well known and still am," said Netter. "I left there in 1971 and started up a private company."

In 1971, Netter organized the predecessor company to Geneve Corporation after serving as CEO and director of CBWL-Hayden Stone.

In addition, Netter has been a director since 1998, and is chairman of the executive committee, of The Aristotle Corporation, a publicly traded manufacturer and global distributor serving the education, health and agriculture markets.

"I've always had an interest in philanthropy," said Netter. "My principal two areas have been to see if we can help out public education which has some major problems and cancer gene therapy."

In 1992, Netter and his wife Barbara began their first large-scale philanthropic organization. The couple helped to establish the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships. The organization, based out of the University of Pennsylvania, reaches inner-city schools in West Philadelphia, giving the students access to the university resources, professors and students.

"We connect to about 45,000 students," said Netter. "It's strongly supported by the university. The cost per student runs about \$700. The university becomes sort of mentors to them. In this case, they see a 20 year-old student at the university and the kids talk to them and see wherever they are in their life, there are opportunities for them."

Netter said the program has been instituted in 23 universities in the United States and has plans to go nationwide. The University of Oklahoma has recently replicated the program for its campus.

"The concept is if you want to fix the system you've got to fix the community," said Netter. "They had started the concept before I got there and I fell in love with it."

Netter said one of the early initiatives provided a garden space as a place to help students grow and understand responsibility.

"One of the key issues we face in this country is finding ways to improve public schools," said Netter. "What Penn has achieved in West Philadelphia with university-assisted community schools is dramatic. If it could be duplicated on a national scale, it could go a long way toward significantly improving the education system."

Netter's second initiative was in the new medical field of cancer gene therapy.

"In life, so many people, family and friends are struck by cancer," said Netter. "The question is, What are we effectively doing? What we were doing was chemo, radiation and surgery. That's been going on for 50 years and each of those things has dramatic side effects."

According to Netter, 8 percent to 20 percent of cancer cases die from the treatment.

"It's great if you can get rid of it, but I've always thought there should be a better solution," said Netter. "What they were doing was treating what happens as opposed to trying to fix what's causing the problem. Almost all cancer, in the 90th percentile, is caused by a missing or defective gene. You can replace the missing gene or you can repair the defective gene, which effectively is what gene therapy is."

Netter saw the current against progress as he had seen in his supervisor so many years before "People continue to do things in a pattern that they're accustomed to," said Netter. "To motivate them to change is not easy. You have to realize a problem and then roll-up your sleeves and decide if you want to go to work. Doctors learn about chemo, radiation and surgery and that's it. It's very difficult for them to change because that's what they know and that's how they make a living."

In 2000, Netter attended an all-day seminar at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. He learned there was no organization to provide research grants for gene therapy in the United States.

Netter designed a filtering structure that enabled the best proposals in the country to receive grant funding.

"Why couldn't you try to find the best placement of the funds?" said Netter.

In order to get this program running, Netter teamed with Dr. Savio Woo, professor and chairman of gene and cell medicine at Mt. Sinai, to select 10 scientists, two each for the five areas of research in gene therapy.

Today Netter's organization, Alliance for Cancer Gene Therapy, awards grants twice a year at either \$500,000 or \$1 million.



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