

Living All Ahead Full

Relishing full engagement in everything he undertakes, Pat Loftus has never had a boring day, and doesn't expect to.

PAT LOFTUS CLEARLY doesn't do anything halfway. From the early days of his professional career to his present role as chairman emeritus of the National Steel Bridge Alliance, Loftus has never stopped short of full engagement in his chosen endeavors.

After graduating from Boston College, Loftus spent several years as a technical field representative with Lincoln Electric before joining General Dynamics Corporation's Shipbuilding Division. He worked for four years in Quincy, Mass., on liquefied natural gas (LNG) ship construction, developing welding procedures for low-temperature, high-notch toughness steel fabrication. In 1975, Loftus moved to South Carolina to be the firm's manager of quality assurance and welding engineering, then manager of operations. And it was there that he took up the sport of foxhunting.

"My wife has always ridden and was a foxhunter," he said. "I started when I was in my 30s." In 1985 the family moved to Eastern Pennsylvania and for the past 25 years he has ridden with the Andrews Bridge Foxhounds, a local club. These days he tries to set aside Mondays and Thursdays for foxhunting. "We have all sorts of people—school teachers, plumbers, tradesmen, doctors and lawyers—but on the weekday hunts there are far fewer people."

"It's all about riding and the hound work. That's the real sport," Loftus said. "In the United States, unlike England and Ireland, we do not kill the fox. When it goes to ground and down a hole, we wish it well and go off to find another fox."

Loftus also enjoys kayaking, both as a family activity and as a competitive sport. "We saw some kayakers in Martha's Vineyard one summer about 15 years ago," he recalled, "and I was really intrigued. We tried it, and I just loved it." He soon got very serious about the sport, attending seminars, taking classes, and eventually becoming certified as an American Canoe Association sea kayak instructor.

"It's been a real learning process for me," said Loftus, who also picked up some impressive medical knowledge along the way. He began with a

simple first aid course but quickly realized that wouldn't be adequate. He ultimately went back to school and became a licensed emergency medical technician (EMT).

Both he and his daughter, Tracy Keller, are involved in kayak racing, but Loftus recalls one of his most memorable kayaking moments was about five years ago as he and his wife, Fran, were circumnavigating the island of Manhattan. "It's 24 miles around, and takes about 10 hours because of the tides and currents. It was in the winter, and snowing a little. We were coming down the Hudson River in the early evening, and the lights were all on. As we came along the West Side Drive, all we saw were the buildings. You don't see all the cars and the highway when you're right at water level, and Manhattan is absolutely beautiful from that perspective."

His other, and perhaps most fulfilling, passion these days is coaching his 10-year-old granddaughter Caroline's hockey team. Loftus took up coaching about five years ago when she first took an interest in the sport. "I grew up outside of Boston, and everyone played hockey, so I've been playing my whole life," he said. "In fact, I still play two nights per week." But because being a coach required certification by the United States Hockey Association, he again jumped into a regimen of coursework and seminars.

"This year we had an all-girls team, which was the first for our rink. It was a slow start, but by year-end we were competitive with any team we played. We actually won one of the major tournaments and got great big trophies. That was just great fun. You'd think they had won the Stanley Cup."

Loftus retired in 2005 after 20 years as president of High Steel Structures, but continues to be a strong advocate for the structural steel industry as liaison between the NSBA membership and governmental agencies and contractor associations. And thanks to his breadth of experience, he has been and continues to be an effective voice for steel in Washington.

"At High Steel we were bridge fabricators and bridge erectors," he said. "And when you realize the success or failure of your company is very closely tied to actions of the federal government you become very interested in what happens in Washington, and why. And at some point you say, we better go down and talk to those people." So he did, and still does.

"It's really important for people to develop interests that will not just fill up the time in retirement years but will productively use time as it becomes more available to them," Loftus said. "So many people I talk with ask me, 'What do you do with all your time? Don't you get bored?' And I say, 'I haven't had a boring day ... ever.' And there's really no reason anyone should."

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◀ Caroline Keller (blonde hair, immediately behind the goalie) with her championship Under 10 Girls hockey team. Coach Loftus is in the orange jacket.