

Robert Hopkins, Alpha Phi 1964

Many recent graduates are busy trying to find a job, figure out what they will do with their lives, and hopefully live their dreams. Robert Hopkins had a job when he graduated from Purdue University, but he didn't have the foggiest notion where life would lead him. He had dreams and aspirations like the rest of us, but who knew what life had in store for him?

As you read Bob's bio, you quickly come to learn that his life was not ordinary, and he had a hand in shaping the lives of others for the better. "Dr. Robert Hopkins – former senior vice president and general manager of Sony Pictures High Definition Center. Under his leadership the High Definition Center won an Emmy for transferring movies to digital HDTV. Previously he was executive director of the Advanced Television Systems Committee (ATSC) in Washington, DC developing the HDTV standard for the United States and representing the US in setting international HDTV standards. He was one of the pioneers in digital video, beginning his efforts in that area in the early 1970s with RCA at the David Sarnoff Research Center in Princeton, NJ." (Source: Lecture; Florida Atlantic University Executive Leadership Series, February 1, 2007).

Bob was born in Kentucky and raised in Indiana. His father was an electrician in the coal mines in Kentucky before moving the family to Holton, Indiana, for a better life for the entire family. Bob's father found work as an electrician in an Indiana plant and stayed there until he retired. Bob attended a small, country school before attending Purdue University. "If it wasn't for my parents encouraging the school to offer a chemistry class and my self-study of analytical geometry the summer after my high school graduation, I would not have been as well prepared entering Purdue," Bob explains. Bob majored in electrical engineering and quickly found that while the theoretical nature of engineering was interesting, he was more interested in the practical application of engineering. "I wanted to know more than equations; I wanted to learn, for example, how a transistor worked."

Midway through his senior year at Purdue, Bob was hired by the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) to work in their research laboratory in Princeton, New Jersey. While at RCA, Bob completed his graduate work in electrical engineering at Rutgers University – earning both a Masters degree and a Doctoral degree. One of the assignments Bob worked on while at RCA Labs was early development of digital television. In 1980, the RCA Broadcast Equipment Division made Bob its Manager responsible for strategic planning related to digital television.

His work continued to attract a lot of interest around the world including a business trip to China to set-up video-voice imaging over a phone land line,

much like a facsimile machine that we know today. "Actually, it was during President Nixon's visit to China that I was already there," offers Bob.

Bob was promoted again to Managing Director of the RCA manufacturing plant located on Jersey Island off the coast of France. There he focused on international production of commercial broadcast cameras and video recorders for Europe. After returning from Jersey Island, Bob left RCA to become Executive Director of the Advanced Television Systems Committee (ATSC) in Washington, DC. "Our focus was to establish voluntary standards for high definition television (HDTV)," Bob offers. Bob was the US representative to the international group that established standards for the world related to HDTV. "The international community accepted one of the US proposals that turned out to be very important, that the HDTV image have 1,920 pixels across the picture and 1,080 pixels vertically", Bob remarks. Today, the international community recognizes Bob for his role. After the voluntary standards were completed, Bob met with the FCC to hand over the standards that were developed; it would be the FCC's job to institute the standards. Bob was also required to testify before Congress on the standards for HDTV and promoting their adoption for universal use.

Soon after, Bob was hired by Sony Pictures to be their executive in charge of converting all of their film movies to digital HDTV copies (used to make DVDs), as well as working with producers and directors on utilizing digital cameras and HDTV technology for current and future movie productions. "We used equipment that had been built by the Sony Electronics Company to our specifications to convert films to high definition. We were recognized in Hollywood for having the best transfers," Bob offers. It was Bob's leadership that led to his division being recognized by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences with an Emmy (1998) for their work in developing protocol and equipment for the transfers to be such a success.

Today, Bob is retired and enjoys other aspects of his life with his wife, Hanna, and their dog, Ms. Maggie. Bob enjoys taking trips on his Harley Davidson every year and has completed trips on Route 66, the Natchez Trace, and the Blue Ridge Mountains. "I'm considering what to do for my next trip," Bob chuckles, "I may travel US Route 50 from the Atlantic to the Pacific or join the Trail of Tears Bike Ride." The US Route 50 trip would have a lot of personal meaning for Bob. The highway runs through his hometown of Holton, Indiana, as well as other key places he has lived and visited throughout his career.

You can visit Bob's website at www.rhopkins.us to learn more about Bob, his family, and his past and current bike trips.

