

## Mark Kannenberg

Chief Executive Officer, RBP Chemical Technology Inc. (Retired)

Member Since 2015

Like Mr. Rodgers changing from his suit jacket into a cardigan and sneakers, Mark Kannenberg is trying retirement on for size and getting comfortable with this new phase of life.

After selling 80 percent of RBP Chemical Technology, his specialty chemistry company, to his management team two years ago, Mark began stepping back from the business he ran for nearly 40 years. When the COVID pandemic hit, Mark, like millions of others, stopped going to work every day. It made him realize he could—and should—step back even more.

“I took advantage of that opportunity to back away, give the team more responsibility and just work part time and then, very little time,” said Mark, who just recently sold the final 20 percent to the team, marking the end of a fulfilling career.

“I always enjoyed bringing in new people. Keeping ahead of the curve in technological developments was always fun.” Mark is also proud that during his tenure his company never faced a lawsuit or had a single industrial accident. “Most of all, I enjoyed working with such a good cadre of people.”

How a West Point grad, Army officer, tank platoon leader and supply chain specialist ended up back in Wisconsin owning a chemical company in West Allis was a case of being in the right place at the right time.

After serving in Vietnam and fulfilling his military commitment, Mark, newly married to Ginny, saw that finding employment during the recession of the early 1970s would be challenging, so he enrolled in Harvard Business School, earned his MBA and landed a job with a Chicago-based company. Eight years later, a headhunter called with a great job prospect in Milwaukee. He, Ginny and their two young daughters settled in Whitefish Bay only to have that job fall through within a year due to an acquisition. Then, an acquaintance introduced him to the owner of RBP, who happened to be looking for someone to take over his business.



“I interviewed and got the job, worked for him for about three years and then bought the company.”

Mark’s career afforded him the opportunity to join numerous trade associations and he worked his way up through a number of them to serve as president. He also lobbied for manufacturing-related legislation in Washington, D.C. and traveled extensively for business to plants and customers across the United States and internationally.

Not surprisingly, his schedule left little time to become extensively involved in much else.



“But now that I’m retired, I’ve become more active in Rotary and in my church. I’m looking forward to being able to get more involved.”

An accomplished golfer since he was a kid, Mark has long been active with the Wisconsin Golf Association, serving as chairperson, board member and as president of the organization, which offered the perk of playing all the top courses.

Mark spends a great deal of his time on efforts with the Harvard Business School Club of Wisconsin and, in particular, its scholarship program for nonprofit leaders.

“We raise funds for scholarships to send people to Harvard’s Strategic Prospective and Nonprofit Management course—people from the Milwaukee Symphony, the Rep, Feeding America, the Boys and Girls Club and other organizations. They come back and say what a transformative experience it was. This is something that ends up having such a positive impact on the city.”

It is local leaders like these who inspire him.

“When I think of people who motivate me, it’s guys like Michael Gosman [2024 Rotary Club of Milwaukee Person of the Year], who are so passionate and get things done for the good of the community. I’m inspired by people who are in the position to make our world a little better and do whatever it takes to make it happen—the folks who are involved in Rotary’s Guatemala projects, for instance.”



Mark, who served on the 2023-2024 Rotary Board of Directors and is a member of the Veterans & Military Community Support Committee, said Rotary was a good place to land in his retirement years.

“My dad was the West Bend Rotary President so I’ve known about Rotary forever. I tried to get involved early in my career but I was never around enough. When I knew I would be retiring and thought about what I would do next and how I could give back to the community, Rotary seemed like a good place to do that.”

It turned out to be a good fit.

“I love the diversity of people. I like the Four-Way Test and what it implies. The variety of speakers we have is incredible, and I’m amazed by all we do all over the world. That’s our Rotary club in a nutshell and I’m just trying to figure how I will best fit in going forward.”