

Muncie native **Mike Johnston**, '77MA81, has a curiosity for transportation that goes back to building model trains in high school.

But it wasn't until he took a job loading trucks after graduating that the pieces started to align for his career path. "I'm small, and I decided manual labor was not for me," he says. "I needed to go to college."

Working his way up in the transportation field full-time, Johnston could only attend a night class or two at Ball State each semester. Many thought he could never finish a degree only taking night classes. He used that as motivation to strive forward. "Don't tell me I can't do anything, because I am going to show you I can," he says.

In 1965, General Motors (GM) recruited Johnston for an entry-level position in its transportation department. "I wanted to learn every job they had," he says.

In the beginning, he admits he was given the "crummy" jobs, but it was all worth the experience he gained in logistics. He found going to school

and working at GM beneficial to his development. "As I learned things, I could start applying pieces of it," he says. "That just ingrained what I learned."

After 15 years of taking one night class a week, Johnston earned his bachelor's degree in business administration. He continued at GM, elevating to divisional transportation manager.

Johnston directed global logistics operations at GM for 23 manufacturing plants in nine U.S. cities and seven foreign countries. Logistics involves the movement of materials from raw form through the manufacturing, warehouse and storage processes, onto consumers.

During the gas crisis in the 1970s, Johnston came up with an ingenious plan to supply gas to one of GM's plants using rail cars that normally carry liquid ammonia to farms for fertilizer. He found the strategy involved to be the most rewarding part. "That's the fun of it," he says. "It's like playing chess."

Johnston was one of the best in the field. During the blizzard of 1978, a plant needed a mechanical piece vital to its operation. With trucks stuck in several feet of snow, Johnston rented a helicopter to deliver the part and keep production going.

Helping to revolutionize the industry, Johnston became one of the foremost logistical experts, authoring studies and textbooks and presenting several papers. In 1984, Johnston was offered an adjunct professor position at Ball State's Miller College of Business (MCOB), teaching logistics, a course he taught until 2002.

He also served as president of the MCOB advisory board from 1993-94. He was honored twice by MCOB with its Award of Achievement in 1998 and Award of Distinction in 2008.

Johnston left GM in 1993, but continued to work in logistics until he retired in 2008. His idea of retiring still involved consulting on logistics.

Retirement has also given him more time to devote to one of his passions—the railroad. He wrote *Railroads in Muncie, Indiana*, in 2009. Much of his time recently has been spent working on railroad models at Minnetrista and the Cardinal Greenway Depot in Muncie.

Throughout Johnston's life—marrying **Jackie (Rein)**, '64MA67, raising two sons, and progressing his career—Ball State has stayed a constant fixture for the family. "Ball State has been our family," he says. "We said we would never live in a town that didn't have a university because there is so much diverse activity going on."

Whether the Johnstons are contributing to a scholarship, engaging in the Ball State University Foundation and Cardinal Varsity Club activities or participating in an alumni event, he says that he has made Ball State involvement a major part of his life. "We're active. We're doing things. It's not lip service." In 1997, Johnston received Ball State's Benny Award for service to the university.

Johnston says he lives for the Ball State men's basketball season. Each winter, he can be found in his usual seat, cheering on the Cardinals. ●

—Denise Greer



PHOTO BY DENISE GREER

Graduate of the Last Decade Award



Cara Tuttle Bell, '00, is director of programs for the Women's Center at Northwestern University.



Renee Cha, '00MS02, is a clinical nutrition manager/patient services manager in Aiea, Hawaii.



Cory Calvin, '01, is director of franchise support at Valpak.



Jennifer (Rice) Dial, '07, is a public relations consultant at St. Vincent Health in Indianapolis.