

Industry Leaders of Southwestern Illinois

Retiring head of Ameren Illinois urges corporate citizenship

Growing up on Center Street, Collinsville native Richard Mark never dreamed he would one day lead a major subsidiary of a Fortune 500 company with 3,500 employees and more than \$15 billion in assets.

He could only smile when asked if he imagined being named CEO of St. Mary's hospital in East St. Louis at age 35, recounting his interview at the hospital with 60 Minutes about trauma centers in inner cities.

He shook his head when recalling how he was asked by then Illinois Governor Jim Edgar to turn around the finances of the struggling East St. Louis School District; his role on a special panel helping the District to emerge 10 years later with \$20 million in reserves when it faced \$4 million in debt.

Mark, 66, says anyone looking at his educational credentials would likely pause when learning that a man with a bachelor's degree in early-childhood education would one day be a hospital CEO, let alone president of Ameren Illinois.

However, as Mark, gets ready to retire on Aug. 1, he wouldn't change a thing. Each stop, from education, to government affairs to health care, to his 20 years at Ameren, has given him a unique perspective in his decision making all the while focusing on people and serving the community.

"It has definitely been a non-tradi-



tional career path," Mark said. "I taught school, coached football, worked for the police department, worked for county government, worked on political campaigns, led a hospital and ran the largest combination utility in Illinois. Those varied experiences gave me a great perspective in my decision making because I saw things along the way that others didn't."

Mark says was blessed with great mentors each time he made a career change. It all started with his parents, Joseph and Cleola Mark, who stressed getting an education and setting goals. Joseph was a union hod carrier, while Cleola was a nursing and teaching assistant.

"I think the traits I learned from my parents of being respectful, helping others, being trustworthy, and doing the right thing have stuck with me my whole life," he said. "They built the confidence in me at an early age that I could do whatever I wanted to do with a good education and hard work.

"I stress that same message today of getting a good education, and no matter



Mark

what your job, do it better than anyone else has ever done it – you will be rewarded for your hard work."

After a stellar athletic career at Collinsville High School, he attended Iowa State University on a foot-

ball scholarship where legendary coach Earle Bruce was just getting started.

Mark was a defensive back for the Cyclones. Mark remembers the team was practicing when he made a misstep covering a receiver and that step caught Coach Bruce's eye. The coach yelled enough to make sure Mark wouldn't repeat the misstep.

Mark remembers telling Bruce, "If you would stop yelling, maybe I will be able to think and get it right." Bruce fired back, "if I make you nervous, what are you going to do when you're playing in front of 90,000 people in the stadium of an opponent who hates you?" It left an impression.

"I understood what Coach Bruce said that day. It's the little things. As a defensive back, if you take the wrong first step when the ball is snapped, the receiver is gone," Mark recalls. "I thought about that before my 60 Minutes interview. I think about that before any TV interview, before any hearing, public appearance, or speech. The way you ensure success and overcome tense situations is with extreme preparation. That way when you make that first step, it is the right step."

Mark also credits Gene Brombolich, former mayor of Collinsville; Jerry Costello, former U.S. representative; Chuck Windsor, former CEO of St. Mary's Hospital; and Chuck Mueller, former CEO of Ameren Corp. as having big influences on his career.

Combining sound advice from his mentors with a personal drive to excel, Mark has achieved success and been recognized nationally for his leadership. He said the accolades are rewarding, of course, but he wants his legacy at Ameren Illinois to be about his hard work, commitment to customers, visionary thinking, a voice for Downstate Illinois on utility-related legislation and philanthropy that will continue to live on for many years to come.

"I think we've demonstrated that it's possible to achieve success in business and life and still maintain a passion for helping people," Mark said. "Being a strong corporate citizen matters today more than ever and I think we've done things the right way."

