

This monthly article highlights one of our branch members. We hope that you enjoy knowing a little more about your fellow members and the interesting life they have had. If you have someone you would like to nominate or if you would like to help author an article, please email the editor, Ron Nakamoto, at [ron.nakamoto\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:ron.nakamoto(at)yahoo.com).

RAY PIONTEK



Which would you think Ray Piontek would have done in his high school or college years?

- In his junior year of high school: stayed out until four a.m. (to his parent's great dismay) selling and delivering coffee and snacks to truck traffic stuck in a blinding snowstorm in New Haven, CT.
- In college, purchased one hundred submarine sandwiches on his way to his weekly Naval Reserve meeting; then picked them up on his way back to school and went door-to-door in the dorms selling midnight snacks.
- In college, sold Spring Break trips to Bermuda to fellow students.
- In college, rented out tuxedos to students for their Junior and Senior Proms.

If you answered "Yes" to all of the above, you are correct.

Ray was born in New Haven, CT where he attended Notre Dame High School and worked summers in construction and at New Haven Board & Carton, where his dad was the Plant Manager. Ray fondly recalls his Dad taking him on the seventy-five mile train rides to New York City every year as a youngster to see the likes of Mantle, Berra, Mize, Ford, Bauer and others. Ray also remembers his older sister Noreen swinging a bat every bit as good as those Yankees when she hit him in the head during a heated baseball game. "Funny, how some things you never forget." In high school, Ray was the quarterback for one of the elite football teams in the state of Connecticut that went 8-1 his senior year. After graduation, Ray chose to attend Boston College, which led to a great sports rivalry with his dad who attended Notre Dame University during the Rockne years.

Ray enlisted in the Naval Reserves in his sophomore year and spent summer training serving aboard the USS Miller, a U.S. Navy destroyer (DD550) in the North Atlantic where he learned what the straps on his rack (bed) were for after being thrown out onto

a pitching deck a couple of times. He decided that becoming an officer was better than being a “swabbie” so he applied and was accepted to Officer Candidate School in Newport, RI. After graduating from BC with a BS degree in Marketing, Ray received his commission in the U.S. Navy and was accepted to flight school in Pensacola, FL. Upon receiving his “wings” Ray was selected to serve as Instructor and received accolades as the “Top Flight Instructor in the Naval Air Basic Training Command”. Soon after, he headed out to the West Coast and joined an operational Fixed Wing Patrol Squadron flying P-3 aircraft based at Moffett Field. *(Editor’s note: The Lockheed P-3 Orion was a four-engine turboprop anti-submarine and maritime surveillance aircraft developed for the U.S. Navy.)*

After seven years on active duty, which included operational assignments to the Far East, Ray left active duty and pursued a career in the commercial sector. He started with Xerox and moved onto ever increasing positions of responsibility with Apple, Autodesk, and several other companies before his final position as Senior Vice President for Business Development and Worldwide Sales with Unirac, Inc. in Albuquerque, NM. Ray retired from the Naval Reserves with the rank of Captain. He has held numerous senior Sales Management positions over the years while working for highly successful executives such as Jim Buckley, Lowell Sando and Carol Bartz but insists his most influential mentor was Admiral James Stockdale. Upon reading the book *In Love and War* written by Jim and Sybil Stockdale and learning that Admiral Stockdale was working at the Hoover Institute, Ray took the initiative to get to meet Admiral Stockdale. Every meeting left Ray with great respect for “... the Admiral’s courage, clarity of thought and purpose of will.” He was a true American hero who suffered but always continued to lead as the senior prisoner of war at the “Hanoi Hilton”. *(Editor’s note: Admiral Stockdale was the highest-ranking naval officer held as a prisoner in North Vietnam. On September 9, 1965, while flying from the USS Oriskany, Stockdale’s Douglas A-4 Skyhawk, was struck by enemy fire and completely disabled. He ejected and parachuted into a small village, where he was severely beaten and taken prisoner. Stockdale was held as a prisoner of war in the Hoa Lo prison (the infamous “Hanoi Hilton”) for the next seven and a half years. As the senior Naval officer, he was one of the primary organizers of prisoner resistance. Tortured routinely and denied medical attention for the severely damaged leg he suffered during capture, Stockdale created and enforced a code of conduct for all prisoners which governed torture, secret communications, and behavior.)*

Ray met his “Aussie” wife, Irene when she was working at the Australian Consulate in San Francisco. Some friends at a social event introduced them to each other. Ray took the initiative and coyly pitched Irene to help serve as a city guide for his visiting parents as “... he was not familiar with San Francisco at all.” She agreed and as a result, Ray’s first date with Irene just happened to be chaperoned by his parents. It turned out to be an all day and night affair which did not end until about two in the morning. Ray still remembers every stop along the way ending with dancing at the Tonga Room in the

Fairmont Hotel. They have been happily married for forty-two years and have one daughter and three grandsons and feel very fortunate to have them living close by in Los Gatos.

Ray joined the golf activity and plays when he can. He claims to be fighting his way through a fifty-two year slump. His golf creed is "...it is never too late to be what you once might have been", although some of his SIR golf buddies tell him that, in his case, "it really is too late!"

Most of Ray's time now is spent on a very noble cause to aid veterans and victims with furniture and household items to give them a helping hand and some dignity in life. When he learned that many veterans and their families were living, eating and sleeping on floors because they could not afford much to furnish an apartment or house he sprung into action. He formed the Bay Area Furniture Bank (BAFB), a tax-exempt 501(c)(3), non-profit organization on December 17, 2015. The organization's objective is to provide furniture, bedding, and household items to those in need in the community. His hope is to help contribute to those that are building or rebuilding their lives such as veterans recently discharged from military service or victims of personal tragedy or disaster. The stated goal of BAFB is to "...decrease human suffering in Santa Clara County, California and set the stage for those we assist to achieve restored hope, self-esteem, and the stability to take charge and move ahead. We firmly believe that no one should be forced to live, sleep, and eat on the floor." BAFB operates by providing their services through referrals from operating partners such as VA Caregivers, Religious Organizations and Social Service Agencies. As a young company Ray has been able to quickly integrate with the various social services and the local business community. His biggest win to-date has been securing the donation of furniture (some 4,400 pieces) from an eleven-floor renovation the Fairmont Hotel is undertaking in San Jose.

Ray believes he has found the perfect way to contribute back to the community, enjoy retirement and feel good every day he comes home. Ask him and he can tell you gratifying, personal experiences he has, every day. Ray would welcome all types of assistance from his fellow SIR members with open arms. Seek him out at our next luncheon and maybe there will be some way that you can help this noble man and his noble cause. His charity's website is <http://www.bayareafurniturebank.org>.