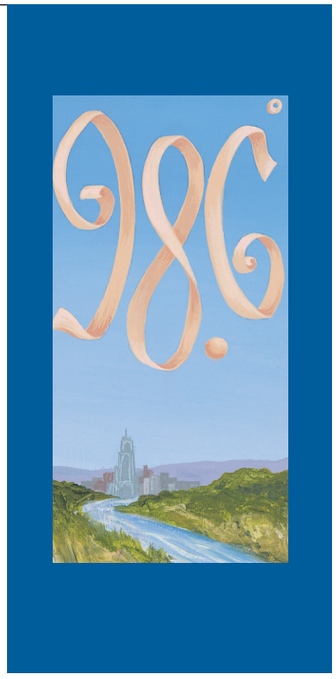
People and programs that keep the school healthy and vibrant



TYPE "O"

A UNIVERSAL DONOR

BY MAUREEN PASSMORE

In football, offensive linemen are the strength of the offense. They protect the quarterback and other teammates running or catching the ball. Usually the biggest men on the field, these players are known for strength, grit, and heart. University of Pittsburgh grad James Covert played on the "O line" for three of his four years on the Panthers team that went 31–5 in the early '80s. (The quarterback he was protecting then was his roommate, Dan Marino.)

Covert was a first-round draft pick of the Chicago Bears and a member of the 1985 Super Bowl XX championship team coached by Pitt and National Football League legend Mike Ditka. Covert's cocaptain on the Bears' offense, Walter Payton, called him the "best offensive tackle in the NFL."

So, what does a lineman do when he retires from the game? He continues looking out for others—just in a different way.

In 2007, after several years in health care sales, marketing, and acquisition initiatives with different companies, Covert joined the Institute for Transfusion Medicine (ITxM) as president and chief executive officer. ITxM specializes in transfusion medicine and related services. With its two blood centers, Central Blood Bank in Pittsburgh and LifeSource in Chicago, it provides many hundreds of thousands of units of blood products annually.

One of Covert's first goals for ITxM was to create a strategic plan, and a large part of that plan was research. He asked, *Why not forge a relationship with a biomedical powerhouse right here in Pittsburgh?*

With Covert's guidance, a relationship between ITxM and Pitt was solidified; that effort focuses on research on blood disorders and blood-related diseases and on serving people with those conditions. A joint gift from ITxM's Blood Science Foundation and ITxM's subsidiary, the Hemophilia Center of Western Pennsylvania, allowed for the creation of the School of Medicine's Vascular Medicine Institute (VMI). The VMI is directed by Mark Gladwin, the Jack D. Myers Professor of Internal Medicine, Distinguished Professor, and chair of medicine. Covert calls the partnership a "win."

"We committed the seed dollars, and once Mark got started, *boom!*, he really took off. He's a dynamo," Covert says. "That passion and energy is what has made VMI so successful."

Covert also credits another group of contributors. "People who give us the gift of their blood in order for us to treat patients are doing an altruistic act. The dollars we earn that go into the Blood Science Foundation really come from the community, and I feel strongly that the money needs to go back into the community."

When he was asked to join the Board of Trustees at Pitt in 2014, Covert saw it as another chance to help. "Pitt has given me so much in my life. I came from a small steel mill town near Pittsburgh and grew up and met my wife at Pitt," he says. "As my career since football has gone through changes, Pitt has prepared me for that.

"You can't say that about a lot of places."

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ANNIE O'NEILL



Covert helped start Pitt's Vascular Medicine Institute.

BOOSTER SHOT

The first March of Dimes, in 1938, was fundraising genius in its simplicity: Get as many people as possible to donate one dime for polio research and care, and you could generate a tidal wave of support for medicine.

The national effort's success helped speed development of the killed-virus polio vaccine at Pitt, which was released in 1955. (It also landed president Franklin D. Roosevelt—who founded what later became the March of Dimes Foundation—a place on the 10 cent coin.)

But medical advancements depend on more than generous donations of cold, hard cash. Without large-scale field trials, the polio vaccine never would have reached the market.



That's why there's the **Pitt+Me** program of Pitt's Clinical and Translational Science Institute. Pitt+Me is a network of people who are committed to improving care in the community and worldwide. At this writing, 103,000 volunteers with 291 different conditions, as well as healthy volunteers, are taking part in 215 active studies—from trials focusing on child health to geriatric medicine and everything in between. If you're in Pittsburgh, maybe you've seen the bus ads. If you've flown the coop since graduation, look around; powerhouse academic medical centers across the country have similar programs.

At **pittplusme.org** you can check your—or your patients'—eligibility. (Follow @PittPlusMe to learn more.) The benefits abound, and you don't have to spend a dime. —*Micaela Fox Corn*