On a recent August afternoon, President G. Timothy Haight introduced himself to K.S. “Bud” Adams, Jr., ’42, the powerful and enduring owner of the NFL Tennessee Titans. In a phone interview, Bud Adams shared a number of colorful experiences in football and business. For Menlo’s President, the opportunity to converse with one of the College’s most famous alumni was a privilege, given his own passion for football and business.

Almost immediately, the two men engaged in a discussion about banks and investments, which led the prudent Texan to inquire about the current market value of the K.S. “Bud” Adams, Jr. Scholarship, which he established in 2002. The endowment currently provides valuable support for nearly twenty Menlo students. The conversation then evolved to the area of professional football. President Haight admitted he’s an avid, lifelong fan of the Washington Redskins. Mr. Adams laughed knowingly.

President: Mr. Adams, congratulations to the Tennessee Titans for a remarkable season last year!

Bud Adams: Yes, thank you. We lost only three games, and won thirteen. In the playoffs we drew a bye, and then faced Baltimore. Baltimore knocked us off in Nashville, 13–10, and then they lost to Pittsburgh in the AFC championship game.

President: What do you consider to be the most important ingredients in building a championship team?

Bud Adams: It’s most important to have a good coach, and what I call a good general manager. The Titans are blessed with both!

Ten years ago, Mr. Adams decided to move the Houston Oilers to Nashville. Because he had almost 900 employees in multiple corporations throughout Houston, he could not move with his team to Tennessee. In 1999 his team became the Tennessee Titans to coincide with the opening of the new stadium.

Bud Adams: After the first four years in Nashville, I asked Mike Reinfeldt to join Jeff Fisher and me in leading the team.

“Success, to me, stems from knowing that you can’t manage multiple organizations by yourself.”

Mike became Executive Vice President and General Manager, and, with Jeff as Executive Vice President and Head Coach, I had great team leadership. This showed especially during the draft, and that’s why last year we almost made it to the Super Bowl. Our goal, of course this year, is to be in the Super Bowl, and once again, we have the makings of a winning team.

A generous benefactor to many causes, Mr. Adams puts great emphasis on high academic achievement, encouraging his players to complete graduate school. It’s apparent that he respects and hires people who excel in business and finance. Needless to say, Dr. Haight is in total agreement.

Bud Adams: Both Mike Reinfeldt and Jeff Fisher were excellent students in college. Mike, a former All-Pro Safety (1976–83) with the Houston Oilers, attended the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. He earned two MBA degrees: one in sports management and the other in finance from Houston Baptist University located in Houston, Texas.

Through the fifty or more years spent running a football franchise, Bud Adams knows that a leader needs to go beyond the responsibilities of the game to keep a team on track. Mr. Adams knows that these superb athletes need an occasional heart to heart talk, lots of common sense and encouragement. When Bud Adams looks at a player, he makes the same tough decisions he makes in the boardroom, the oil field or trucking firm. He is a man who is proud of his team, and deeply involved on a daily basis. He is also part of the lifeblood of the NFL.

In addition to his incredible NFL history, in April 2001, along with Warren Buffett, Bud Adams was named by Forbes Magazine as one of the top two “Best Value CEOs.” In March 2009, he made the Forbes “World’s Billionaires” list. In the October 2009 issue of that publication, he was sited on the “Forbes 400 Richest Americans 2009” list. Mr. Adams’ many activities include farming, ranching, oil, and automobile dealerships, as well as his role as CEO of the National Football League franchise Tennessee Titans.

President: What is the secret to your success as a CEO?

Bud Adams: Success, to me, stems from knowing that you can’t manage multiple organizations by your-
Entering his 50th year as Founder, Owner, Chairman of the Board, President and CEO of the Titans/Oilers NFL franchise, K. S. “Bud” Adams, Jr. is an enduring figure in the National Football League.

As one of the original team owners in the American Football League, he has guided his franchise to new heights posting six playoff appearances, including an AFC Championship (1999), an AFC Central title (2000), two AFC South titles, an AFC Championship appearance, and Wild Card teams. He is one of only four current NFL owners to reach the 350-win plateau.

A native of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Adams’ interest in sports was first displayed while at Culver Military Academy where he earned letters in football, basketball and baseball. Upon graduation from Culver in 1940, Adams attended Menlo College, lettering in both rugby and football. Adams then transferred to the engineering school at the University of Kansas where he also lettered in football. At KU, Adams met his future wife, Nancy Neville.

In 1942, while still in school at KU, Adams joined the U.S. Naval Reserve. In July 1943, he was sent overseas and was assigned to a PAC-Fleet carrier unit, where he served as an aviation engineering officer. Lt. j.g. Adams was an aide in the U.S. Navy’s Congressional Liaison Office in Washington D.C.

In 1946, Adams started ADA Oil Company, which was a forerunner of the publicly-held American Stock Exchange-listed Adams Resources & Energy, Inc. (AE), an energy company engaged in the business of marketing crude oil, natural gas and petroleum products; tank truck transportation of liquid chemicals; and oil and gas exploration and production. Adams’ other business interests include extensive farming and ranching in California and Texas, cattle feeding, real estate, automobile dealerships and leasing.


In his fifth decade as founder, owner, chairman, president and CEO of the Tennessee Titans (formerly Houston Oilers and Tennessee Oilers), the hard-working and aggressive Adams has made professional football history numerous times. In 1968, Adams’ Oilers were the dominant team in the American Football League during 1960-69, playing in the championship game four times and winning twice consecutively; earning four AFL Eastern Division Championships; and making the playoffs five years. In 1970, the AFL merged into the expanded NFL. Adams’ teams won the AFC Central division three times; and made the playoffs 16 times.

Adams currently works on several prominent NFL committees, including the NFL’s Finance, Hall of Fame, Legislative and Audit Committees; and he is a Trustee for the NFL Trust. Very active in national, state and local programs, Adams is on the Board of Directors of the Cherokee Indian National Historical Society; the Board of Trustees of the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio; the Board of Directors of the Boy Scouts of America Sam Houston Area Council; and a Lifetime Director of The Hundred Club in Houston.

In recent years, in addition to the approximately $18 million given to charities in Tennessee as a direct result of Mr. and Mrs. Adams creating the Tennessee Titans Foundation, Adams has made significant personal contributions totaling more than $4.5 million combined, to his favorite charities.
Included in his scrapbook is a picture of his Glee Club trio.

Bud Adams: We formed a trio with Mrs. William Kratt as Director. She recruited me. In the picture are Don Ross, Doug Janning and myself. I was secretary and Don, who played football too, was president. Now, can you imagine me in the Glee Club?

President: Well, you know Mr. Adams, I thought the most famous group to come out of Menlo was the Kingston Trio, but maybe I’m wrong. Mr. Adams, I can’t tell you how much I have enjoyed this. Two weeks ago, I spoke at great length with another Menlo College alum, Bob Lurie (former owner of the San Francisco Giants), about baseball, and now this is truly a treat listening to you. I could do this for days. This should be a great year for you, and you’re actually going to be playing the San Francisco 49ers in November. How do you think the Titans will do this year?

Bud Adams: What I expect them to do? I think our selections were strong enough that we have a lot to look forward to.

President: Mr. Adams, we’re obviously very appreciative of everything you’ve done for us and we’re very proud of you. I’d really like to thank you for allowing us to feature your accomplishments, and I’m hoping to see you on November 8th. Go, Titans!

Bud Adams: Yes! We’d like to have you sit in our box.

President: Thank you very much, sir.