

LAST LOOK

JAMES C. METZGER:

WINNING IN SPORTS & BUSINESS

By JEFF BERMAN

As chairman and CEO of Garden City-based Whitmore Group, James C. Metzger has guided the privately held company that he started in 1989 into becoming one of the most successful independent insurance brokerage and financial services firms in the region. We recently caught up with him to get his take on technology and other trends impacting the insurance market, what sets the Whitmore Group apart from its rivals, and how sports have played a key role in his youth and career. Here are excerpts from our conversation:

Long Island Press: What would you say sets the Whitmore Group apart from other insurance companies?

James C. Metzger: By virtue of building the company over 30 years, the premium volume that we have with our carriers – both in terms of the number of carriers we represent and the premium volume that we have developed with those carriers – gives us underwriting advantages and underwriting leverage with those markets.

LIP: What is your vision for the company amid the challenges faced by your industry?

JM: I feel like we've kind of figured out over 30 years how to be really good at what we do, and to achieve critical mass with the insurance companies and to develop a lot of trust and confidence with our carriers. And what has helped us achieve that is making strategic acquisitions, over the last 10 years in particular, of smaller agencies. We're still a privately held firm and one of the relatively few left of our size that have maintained our independence.

LIP: Can you specify how technology may be a disruptor?

JM: I have strongly considered how self-driving cars will impact the

automobile side of our business. That's a real concern. Algorithms and robotical [technology also]. Let's face it. We saw what happened to travel agencies a long time ago. The role of the advisor and the role of the consultant, I think, will always be important in the insurance industry.

LIP: When you say some are buying insurance directly from rivals, would I be correct to guess some of that is being done online?

JM: Sure. I think life insurance is probably bought online more frequently and in a bigger way than property and casualty. Life insurance and automobile insurance, I think, we've certainly seen competition that way. Those verticals within the insurance industry have taken a pretty big bite out of the apple.

LIP: You were a lacrosse All-American at Hofstra University and played lacrosse and football at Half Hollow Hills High School. How do you incorporate those interests into your career?

JM: I think a win is a win – whether you're vying for an account and you win the account or you win a lacrosse game or a football game. And you don't always win. There's always a guy bigger, faster or stronger, and you learn how to compete. And I think you can learn a lot from losing as well, not just winning. Sometimes you can learn more from losing than winning because you have to address possibly weaknesses or areas that require improvement.

LIP: Philanthropy in general is very important for you. Can you explain why and how you select which organizations to support?

JM: Many of our clients will approach us with their philanthropy or the causes in which they're involved, or the charities and foundations that they support. I believe in supporting academia on

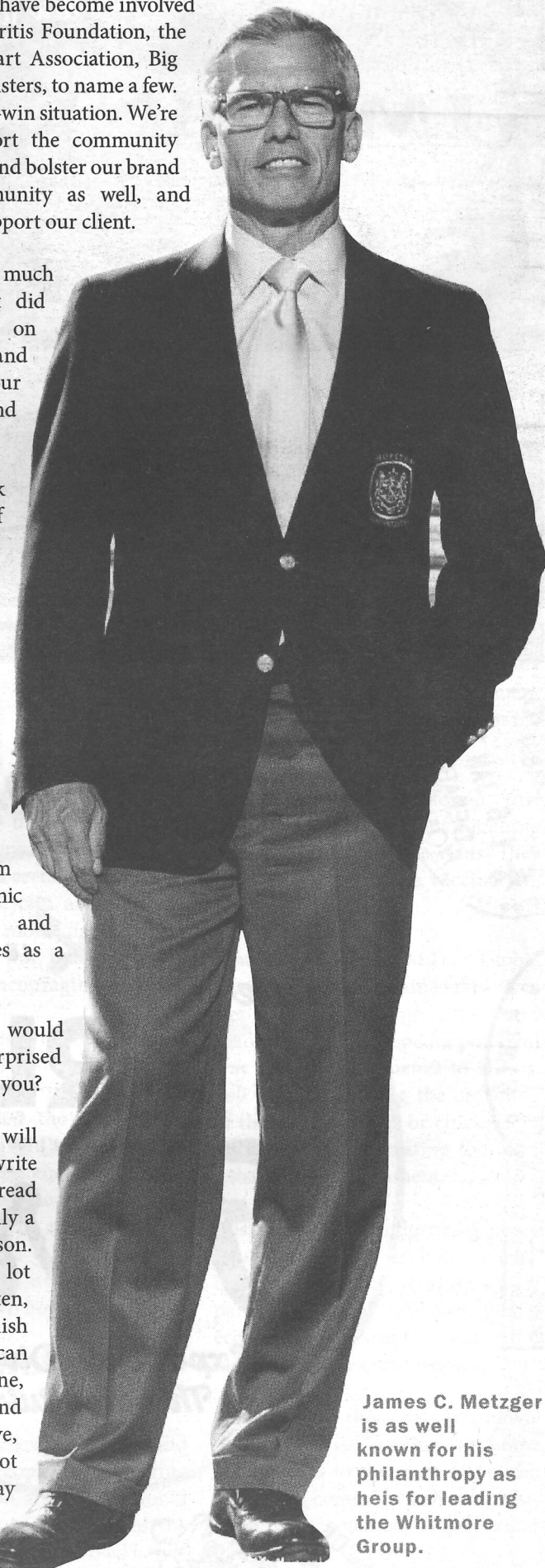
Long Island. I have become involved with the Arthritis Foundation, the American Heart Association, Big Brothers Big Sisters, to name a few. It is a win-win-win situation. We're able to support the community and enhance and bolster our brand in the community as well, and sometimes support our client.

LIP: How much of an impact did growing up on Long Island have on your worldview and success?

JM: I think I had a lot of advantages. I was extremely fortunate that I grew up where I did. I think it had a great impact on my business career too because our school district was terrific from an academic standpoint and my experiences as a student athlete.

LIP: What would readers be surprised to learn about you?

JM: People will laugh if you write this and they read it, but I'm really a humble person. I'm around a lot of people often, but I really relish time that I can spend alone, reading and being reflective, and I have a lot of interests away from the business.



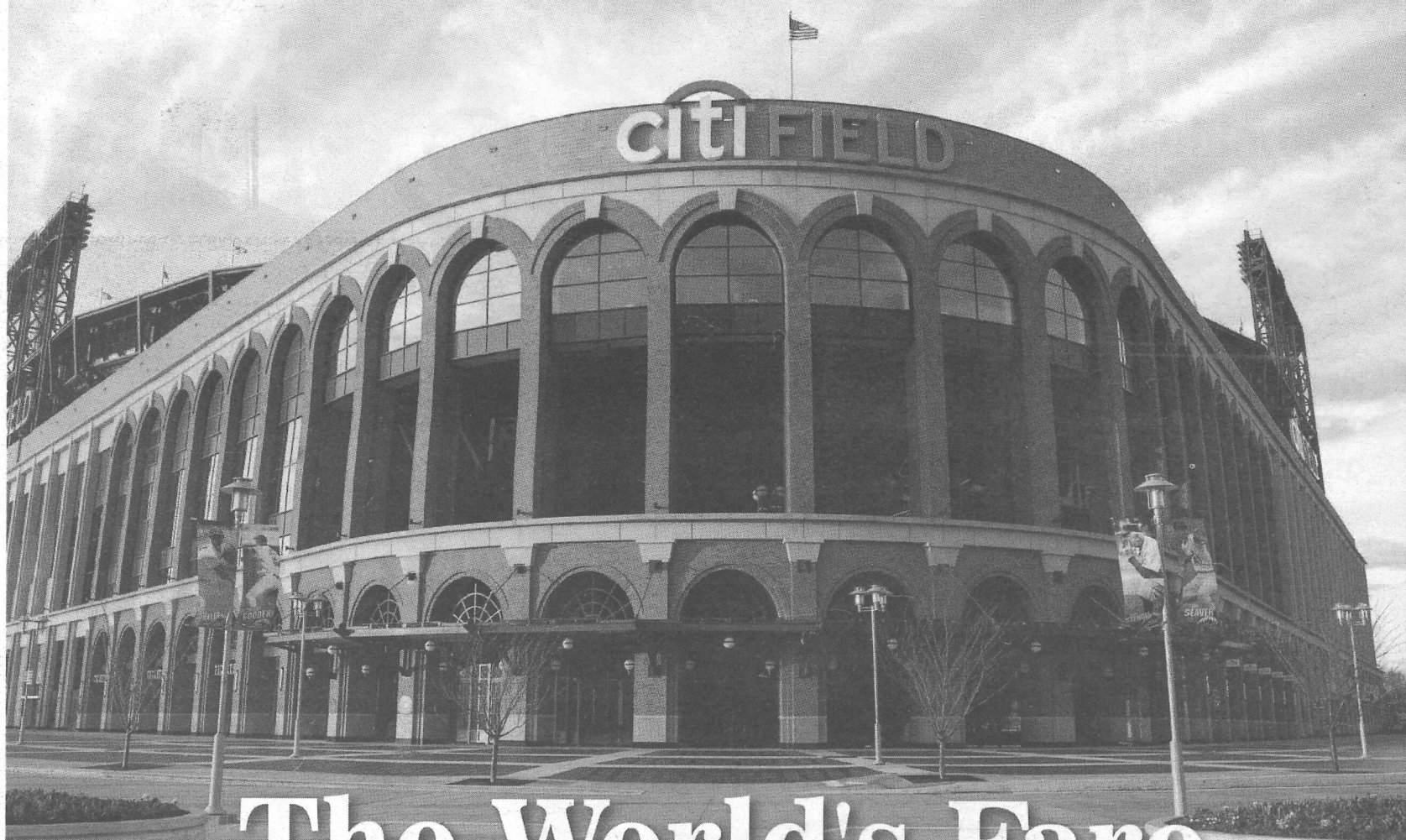
James C. Metzger is as well known for his philanthropy as he is for leading the Whitmore Group.

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