Brotherly love

When Phil and Brian Brunner were playing with Legos and Lincoln Logs as kids in their Milwaukee home, they were doing more than having fun; whether they realized it or not, the brothers were taking the first small steps in their academic careers. “We just had an interest in building things,” says Phil. “That’s what engineering is all about.”

Nearly two decades later, the two are playing with bigger toys at McCormick. Phil (‘08, MS ‘09), who is now pursuing a PhD in materials science, was a talented high-school quarterback who came to Northwestern for reasons that were not strictly academic. “I wanted to challenge myself both intellectually and athletically, and Northwestern is the place to do that,” he says. A walk-on to the football team, Phil was the Wildcats’ long-snapper for three seasons and earned Academic All-American honors.

Brian (BS/MS ’11) joined his older brother at McCormick a few years later. “Phil drew me toward the school,” he says. “I knew that if I followed him, I would have some guidance.” That guidance mainly included advice about which residence hall to live in (Elder Hall) and reminders of how hard engineering courses would be. But both brothers appreciate the presence of a familiar face. “It’s nice having someone there to listen when you’re blowing off frustrations,” says Phil. “At least I think he’s listening.”

The Brunners live together in an off-campus apartment and even took the same class last year, but they don’t share every interest. Brian won’t be getting a PhD, for example. “I’d rather just start working and get some experience,” he says. Brian will be moving on to a commercial plastics company after graduation, while Phil will be continuing his research on plastics. Will there be a collaboration down the road, perhaps including the pair’s three brothers, all engineers? If it does happen, Phil is optimistic. “I wouldn’t want

While the full list of alumni with McCormick family ties is far too long to print, perhaps you’ll recognize some familiar names here:

- Thomas Anderson (’56, ’58, ’61); daughter Patricia Morreale (’83); son-in-law James Morreale (’84)
- Jeffrey K. Braun (’65); sons David Braun (’90) and Kenneth Braun (’94)
- Ronald Church (’58); sons Stephen Church (’86) and Timothy Church (’90)
- William (’81) and Carol Cory (’79); daughter Christine Cory (’11)
- Lee A. Dayton Sr. (’65); son Lee A. Dayton Jr. (’87)
- David Eckert (’77); brothers Alfred C. Eckert III (’71) and James Eckert (’72); son John Eckert (’08)
- John Eshbach (’46, PhD ’47); son-in-law A. Eugene Norby (’68)
- Robert Fierle (’45); son William Fierle (’98)
- Edwin P. Garst (’70); sons James Garst (’00) and David Thomas Garst (’01)
- H. Wallis Gochnauer (’44); son Richard Gochnauer (’72)
- Philip Graham (’60); daughter Sarah Marshall (’98)
- Thomas and Louisa H. Gross (both ’77); children Mary Gross (’06), James Gross (’08), Carol Gross (’10), Susan Gross (’10), and William Gross (’14)
- Promod Haque (’74, PhD ’76); daughter Irene Haque (’11); son-in-law Chad Cochran (’10)
to work with anyone other than my brothers,” he says. “They all work hard. They’re all very intelligent people. I think we can take criticism very well. I can yell at Brian, and he’s not going to go pout or anything.”

His younger brother has a slightly different take: “I always told him that we might work together,” says Brian, “but I’ll never work for him.”

As for the next generation of Brunners, Phil will do his best to further the McCormick tradition. “I’m definitely going to encourage my kids to look at Northwestern. I really love it. That’s why I stayed here another four years.”

Robert Linsenmeier (’75, PhD ’78, professor of biomedical engineering and of neurobiology and physiology); son Jeremy Linsenmeier (’07)

John (’80) and Lori (’81) Luther; son Matthew Luther (’10)

Lyle Mockros (’56, ’57, professor emeritus of biomedical engineering); son Karl Mockros (’86)

Emil C. Muly Jr. (’58, ’62) and Faye Muly (’61); daughter Emily Schmidt (’91); son-in-law Brian Schmidt (’85)

D. Eugene Nugent (’51); son Dale Nugent (’92)

Samuel Pai (’78); daughter Christina Pai (’13)

Warren Rasmussen (’53); son Mark Rasmussen (’81); daughter-in-law Nancy Rasmussen (’80)

Damoder Reddy (’67); son Sridhar Reddy (PhD ’93)

Ginni Rometty (’79); sister Annette Peterson (’86)

William Rosner (’75); children William Rosner (’05), Kathryn Rosner (’07), and David Rosner (’10)
My three daughters

Growing up with parents who worked at Northwestern, the Wolff sisters were introduced to an array of attractions at the school from a very early age: football games, enrichment programs, Cheetos from the Tech Express vending machines. “I thought Northwestern was the only college that existed,” says Grace, 17, the youngest of the three.

“Being around Northwestern so much could have repulsed them so much that they wanted to get as far away as possible, but I think it gave them a glimpse of what a great place this truly is,” says the girls’ father, Alan Wolff (PhD ’08), McCormick’s director of information technology.

Given the choices of all three sisters—Sarah is a junior studying environmental engineering, Esther is a sophomore in manufacturing and design engineering, and Grace will enter McCormick in the fall—it’s safe to say that the family’s close ties to Northwestern were beneficial. “Our dad geared us toward all the resources at McCormick and even introduced us to some department chairs,” recalls Sarah, who enrolled in the engineering and law program, which she would not have known existed if not for her father.

The sisters inspired each other, too. “I used to think engineering was really boring,” admits Grace. “Then during Sarah’s freshman year, she had to redesign a Wii for a stroke patient [in the Engineering Design and Communication sequence]. I thought it was the coolest thing ever.”

Esther was similarly drawn to McCormick’s focus on practical applications. “You do a lot of hands-on stuff here,” she says. Esther has put those skills to use in an internship at Solo Cup, while Sarah has worked as a co-op student for General Electric.

Though Alan says he isn’t much help with homework, he still acts as a valuable resource for his daughters. “Occasionally they wanted to know where a certain room in Tech was, and I could tell them exactly where it was,” he says.

The Wolfs are enjoying this relationship while it lasts. “This is a good college choice for them, but they don’t necessarily have to stay here like I did,” says Alan. “I think this is an excellent launching pad to something else.”

Regardless, the Wolff family legacy at McCormick will continue. For years Alan, his wife, Vivian, the three girls, and their younger brother have been regulars at the annual undergraduate Design Competition, where autonomous robots are pitted against each other. That tradition is likely to live on long after the sisters have graduated.