The LEPAK LEGACY
AMONG THE MANY OBSERVATIONS one might make about them – smart, ambitious, close-knit – the Lepaks are first and foremost Sooners, born and bred. That doesn’t mean Sarah, Billy, Ben, Bobby and Brian were programmed to attend the University of Oklahoma. In fact, the Lepaks say their parents, Mark and Linda, encouraged them simply to know their skills, enhance them and choose a career they would enjoy.

How to explain, then, that of the five Lepak children, four have graduated not only from OU but Price College of Business as well, with youngest son Brian set to graduate in December.

Sure, there may have been subliminal messages along the way. Linda Stoia Lepak, a 1978 graduate of the college, taught business law at the college during the ’80s. Lepak children remember growing up around the school. At one time or another, each considered other universities beside OU. Ultimately, Linda thinks the familiarity with Price, combined with all it had to offer, was a big draw.

“You can go anywhere from the Price College of Business at the University of Oklahoma and we all really believe that and demonstrate that,” Linda said. “We’ve all had a lot of success because of it.”

Ties that bind

Linda grew up in Bartlesville. Her husband, Mark, is from Oklahoma City. They met as OU freshmen in the 1974 President’s Leadership Class. Each graduated in 1978, Linda in business and Mark in engineering, and got married. Linda went to law school at OU while Mark began his career with what is now AT&T. Then, they started having kids; five in eight years.

The oldest, Sarah, was born during law school, and oldest son Billy arrived after Linda passed the bar exam during her first year teaching at OU. It was 1981 at the height of the Oklahoma oil boom.

“At that time, law firms did not have any kind of maternity leave for female attorneys and I knew law firms would be really demanding,” Linda said. “So, I came in and taught business law at Price College. I got pregnant with Ben, then Bobby, and stayed at OU until 1987.”

A series of moves took the family around the country, and Brian was born in New Jersey. As the family later settled in Claremore, Linda could not find another teaching position. So, she decided to open her own law practice.

Linda describes herself as the last person who wanted to get married or have kids. Then she did both. She laughs as she recalls her unconventional approach to raising children.

“Things ran really different at our house because all I knew was business,” she said. “They had a very unusual childhood because I applied what I knew, which was business and accounting, in raising them. Even though I never said, ‘Everyone has to be a business major,’ their upbringing was a big influence in their lives.”

Sarah earned her bachelor’s degree in management with special distinction in 2002. She subscribes to the theory that birth order influences personality traits.

“It’s true. I am the oldest and I was the management major,” she said.

From the outside looking in, Sarah said it does look like everyone chose the same path to OU, Price College in particular. But in reality all the siblings have very, very different personalities and took independent journeys before arriving at the same place.

She started out as chemistry major, thinking about medical school, when she learned about the First Fidelity Integrated Business Core and the JCPenney Leadership Center. Sarah made the switch.

“I thought those were really unique and no other school I knew of had anything like it,” she said. “These are really hands-on programs where you are getting out and doing things.”
She attended the University of Kansas School of Law, graduating in 2005, and currently is an associate at Shook, Hardy & Bacon in Kansas City, Mo.

Sarah admitted that it is ironic that all the kids ended up choosing the same school and college. Yet all have maintained their individualism.

“There was no sit-down with our parents, no, ‘OK, everybody in the family is going to go to OU, be business majors, and then you are going to go to law school,’” Sarah said. “Our parents are really big on the fact that everybody is unique, has their own talents, and has an obligation to figure out what those are to find your purpose in this world.”

Billy is a tax attorney for Thompson & Knight in Dallas. Among his fondest memories of Price College are participating in IBC and JCPenney Leadership, of which he served as chair of the student advisory board.

“IBC was great,” he said. “You put a bunch of college students in a room, tell them to organize themselves, come up with a business idea and donate the proceeds to a good cause.”

The big picture thinking of macro economics appealed to him, and he earned his degree in finance and economics with special distinction in 2004, then went on to law school at the University of Texas, graduating in 2007. After that he earned a master’s of law degree in taxation from New York University in 2008.

“I knew I wanted to go to law school, and I think my degree really prepared me not only for that but also for dealing with the business world in general,” he said. “Almost every job that you have requires you to have some sort of business sense, and you need to know how to relate to, and manage, people.”

As for his three younger brothers following in his footsteps, Billy said he did not influence any of them, adding, “They heard stories about what we were doing and decided they wanted to try it out for themselves.”

Ben said he knew he wanted to go to business and law school right from the start.

“Everyone thinks I followed their path, but the truth is I always knew I wanted to be involved in the business world,” he said. “When I got to OU, finance seemed like a good fit. I thought it would be beneficial to know how money works. It was challenging and a good general business education.”

He received his finance degree with distinction in 2006 and headed to law school at the University of Notre Dame, from which he graduated in 2009. He works in civil litigation for Locke Lord Bissell & Liddell in Dallas.

“I felt prepared going into law school, and a couple of things about Price specifically prepared me,” he said. “The school is a perfect size and creates a community for you. As you get older, you know all of your classmates and professors. Serving as a company president in IBC was really beneficial. It gave me the opportunity to let some of my entrepreneurial side manifest and that really prepared me for the work world.”

Another Price College benefit helped land Ben a job interning at the White House between his junior and senior year.

“After I got to the White House, some of the people who interviewed me were very impressed with IBC, in particular,” he said. “That was a resume item that helped me get that internship.”

Overall, Ben said his education at Price has helped him because he has a basic level of understanding in regard to what his clients are doing in order to perform the complex litigation process.

“The learning curve has not been as steep for me as for others because I have a sense from my finance days as to what all these terms mean and what is going on.”

“From left, Linda, Sarah, Ben, Bobby and Billy enjoy the Price College Third Annual Tailgate in their “Lepak Attack” shirts before watching Brian play in the football game.
Bobby knew he was an entrepreneur from the time he was 3. That’s when he noticed all the parents on cold nights at a soccer field in New Jersey, where his family was living. He thought it would be nice if they could get something hot to drink while they were waiting for their kids. So, Bobby asked his mom if she would help him sell coffee.

“I called it ‘Bob’s Coffee’ and I started out charging a nickel but ended up taking whatever people wanted to give me,” he said. “I did something like that every year. Everybody knew before I did that I would end up at Price College. Everything I see could be a potential business.”

In 2008 he graduated with special distinction with a degree in entrepreneurship and also was named outstanding senior in that major. Currently in his second year in the OU College of Law, he ultimately would like to start a business.

He also was in JCPenney Leadership, IBC and participated in the Governor’s Cup, which gives students from around the state a chance to compete against one another with their ideas for new ventures.

“The thing about Price is I kept brushing up against people who knew us,” he said. “It’s a real family atmosphere. If you see Dean Evans at a basketball game, he waves at you.”

Brian, the youngest, is expected to graduate in December with a dual degree in accounting and finance. He was named outstanding senior in accounting this year and plans to take the entrance exam for law school this summer.

Brian hoped to play football at OU but missed his junior year playing in high school because of injury. Although he had an academic scholarship to OU, he chose to go to Colorado State University on scholarship to play football. After two years there, he transferred to OU and walked on to the Sooner squad.

“I felt like I was missing out on the neat stuff at Price and at OU,” he said. “I knew I wanted to graduate from there.”

Football commitments prevent him from participating in IBC, but he is part of the JCPenney Leadership program.

“I try to be as involved as possible,” he said. “Price College is exactly what I had hoped for. I am enjoying my time here. I do want to do graduate work and may be applying for law school. Right now I am keeping a lot of doors open.”

For the moment, Brian said he wants to enjoy playing his last season of football this fall. He garnered a few headlines last season when he ended up starting at center in the Oklahoma State game.

“I think we all have an aptitude that draws us to business,” he said. “I saw the success in life and careers of my siblings, and it influenced my decision to pursue my education at Price. The college does a good job teaching practical skills. You see how successful students are when they leave and you know that valuable lessons are learned here.”

Ultimately, business is a way of life for the entire Lepak family, including for husband and father, Mark, whom Linda calls the real business person of the family.

“We really laugh about that because he is the one with the most developed business skills who does not have a business degree,” Linda said. “He has been a manager for his whole career.

“My dad loved OU, my father-in-law is also a graduate of Price, and Mark and I along with many other siblings and family members went to OU. I think that is how my kids all ended going there. It was a great opportunity right in their own backyard.”