

DONOR STORIES

BILLY G. JENNER

“Billy G. Jenner Memorial Fund for the Waterloo/Cedar Falls Symphony”



BILLY JENNER

During the 1930's, the Jenner family moved from rental to rental. Wilma did housework to help pay the bills. In 1938, the family rented a house in east Wilton on Highway 6. The first family pet arrived (a small brown dog, Mickey, named after Mickey Rooney). At Easter time, the boys found a pair of rabbits behind the davenport in the living room.

A favorite snack for the boys was sugar sandwiches (white bread spread with butter and sprinkled with white sugar). A summer picnic at Sugar Creek was the favorite pastime for a Sunday afternoon.

On graduation day in June of 1953, Bill and Bob were both commissioned into the U.S. Air Force as Second Lieutenants. They returned to Michigan for the summer and then returned to Iowa to help their dad build a new home.

In February of 1954, Bob and Bill reported to Lackland Air Force Base at San Antonio, Texas, for basis training. In March, they went to Tyndal Air Force Base at Panama City, Florida. They were in controller school for three months. Following this graduation, Bill was assigned to a radar control station in Germany. Part of his service time was spent in North Africa. In 1956, he was honorably discharged as a First Lieutenant.

Following his Air Force career, Bill returned to the University of Iowa to work on his Master's degree. After one year, he was hired by The Rath Packing Company in Waterloo, Iowa, as a sales promotion field representative. During his time at Rath, he was Sales Promotion Manager, Advertising Manager, and Director of Marketing Services.

In 1977, he joined Frank Cooper Advertising, Inc. as a member of the marketing team. He eventually became Senior Vice President of Cooper, Jenner, Stafford and Associates, Inc., a newly created advertising agency.

“[Bill] was very enthusiastic about the Symphony's music mission in the community.”

On January 14, 1961, he married Geraldine Ruby Mixdorf of rural Janesville, Iowa. They made their home at 211 Parkview Boulevard in Waterloo. In 1962, they moved into a new home of their own design in Klingaman Knolls at the south edge of Waterloo. Bill and Jeri had two children: Timothy Gene, born February 8, 1967, and Amy Jo, born July 23, 1968. In November of 1970, they moved to 2535 West 4th Street in Waterloo.

Bill was an outstanding community supporter and volunteer. He served as President and Associate Campaign Chairman of United Way of Black Hawk County, was a founding member of Green Scene, and was President of Big Brothers of Black Hawk County and the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Symphony Orchestra. He was chairman of the Waterloo Community Betterment Committee, which entered Waterloo projects in the Iowa Community Betterment Program in 1978-79. Bill was on the Board of Directors of the Iowa Good Roads Association. He was coordinator for the 1977 “Metro Alliance of Citizens” to promote community involvement in the development of the 1-380 intercity freeway segment. He was cochairman of grounds and maintenance for the Dunsmore House and President of the Rensselaer Russell House Board of Directors. He was also a Waterloo Chamber of Commerce Ambassador. At the time of his death, he was Chairman of the Waterloo Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

The My Waterloo Days celebration was a way Bill felt the citizens of Waterloo could show pride in their city. As Mayor Leo Rooff said after Bill died, "Bill was the driving force behind My Waterloo Days." (Bill died one and one-half months after the first My Waterloo Days celebration.)

In November, 1982, the Waterloo Chamber of Commerce posthumously named Bill "Citizen of the Year".

Among the many other things he did for the community was organizing the move of the East Side and West Side Libraries to the central location on Commercial Street (the old Black Hawk County Courthouse). He also assisted in organizing campaigns to promote bond issues for the public library, metro swimming pools, and Conway Civic Center.

While working on a sales promotion of one-inch thick pod: chops between Rath and a chain of eastern U.S. supermarkets, he coined the name "Iowa Chop" to give Iowa some recognition. While attending the national Chamber of Commerce convention in Washington D.C. in the spring of 1982, he and Jeri had lunch at the Senate dining room. On the menu were Iowa Chops!

At Cooper, Jenner, Stafford, one of his accounts was Hillshire Farms of Wisconsin. They had created a combination bratwurst-cheese sausage and needed a name for it. Bill named it "Cheddarwurst".

Park Behn, who worked with Bill both professionally and on volunteer projects, said, "to him (Bill) nothing was impossible. That's why so many tapped into him - he generated such positive feelings and attitudes, and they are contagious".

Bill was genuinely interested in people and had great enthusiasm about everything. He loved to learn new things and took classes on many things, including woodworking and stained glass making. After the home was built in Klingaman Knolls, he built a large deck with plexiglass walls, then added a redwood sunshade to it, and finally doubled the size of the master bedroom by building a lower level with a door to the deck. Jeri said they moved into town because he had run out of projects, and the house on West 4th Street needed lots of work. When the redecorating of the home was completed, Bill became interested in model railroading. Every Sunday evening, he and other model railroading enthusiasts worked on converting one large room in the basement into a model railroad layout, complete with mountains, etc

While traveling on a family camping vacation to New Mexico, Bill died suddenly of a heart attack in Guymon, Oklahoma. His untimely death, just four days short of his 51st birthday, was a shock to the community. Waterloo Courier's Managing Editor Stewart Haas wrote after his passing, "There was no other place on earth that he loved as much as Iowa, and he devoted his life to making it a better place to live".

Jeri Jenner Karr established the Billy G. Jenner Memorial Fund within the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa in honor of her late husband. The Waterloo-Cedar Falls Symphony was designated as the beneficiary from this Fund. Jeri explained she chose the Symphony because it played an important role in her husband's life, and he was very enthusiastic about the Symphony's music mission in the community. Both Bill and Jeri served as president of the Symphony's Board, he during the 50th season and she during the 60th.