

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## HOWARD HABENICHT, WJU #766



*Photo by Rod Everhart*

Howard Habenicht has been Treasurer of Windjammers Unlimited, Inc. for the last ten years. His 2017 annual summarized financial report for our organization can be found on Page 26.

In the summer of 1983 he attended the Windjammers public concert in Naperville, IL and it included Merle Evans and many Naperville band members. Howard was impressed by the music of the circus and thought it would be neat playing these tunes from the traditional American circus's "Golden Era". So, he joined Windjammers in 1984, attending the January convention that year.

Howard was born in Berwyn, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. His father played accordion, his mother played piano and organ and his sister played violin. So, when the time came, Howard looked over the various possibilities and picked the trumpet as his instrument. He started playing while in the 5th grade and participated in the District Band that included five or six elementary schools. He attended Morton High School in Cicero, IL but moved to Western Springs, IL in the middle of his junior year, attending Lyons Township High School in LaGrange, IL. Since he was a new band member at LTHS, he was assigned to last chair in the cornet section, but within three months he had worked his way up to first chair.

After high school, Howard attended Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Mich., where at that time only music majors were allowed to play in the bands. He enrolled in the school of Business Administration and majored in accounting. Nevertheless, Howard was able to play weekends with the "Golden Notes" dance band in Chicago, which was formed by students at Northwestern University. He loved playing, but in doing so, he also earned enough money to pay for the commute back and forth to Kalamazoo, and had the advantage of being with his family, girlfriend, and other friends back home on almost a weekly basis.

Upon graduation, Howard responded to a blind ad that turned out to be the international accounting firm, Ernst & Ernst. He joined them as a junior accountant, headquartered in downtown Chicago. As an auditor, he had the opportunity to be on assignments with many companies in a variety of industries. He passed the CPA exam in 1967 and was with Ernst & Ernst for 19 years, the last 7 of which as a member of the firm's Midwest Region Technical Committee. Howard says that this is where his education really took place.

Following his time at Ernst & Ernst, he joined Vibro/Dynamics Corporation as Controller and Corporate Secretary and soon after was elected to their Board of Directors. Vibro was a young, growing company whose Founder and President was a close personal friend in need of help with the financial side of the business. The company manufactured and sold industrial machinery mounts and mounting systems for various machine tools, with a heavy emphasis on metal forming "punch presses". These products controlled vibration and noise transmissions in manufacturing facilities all over the world. Companies like Ford, General Motors and Chrysler were significant clients. In one case, Vibro's mounts were used to install a three million pound transfer press.

Howard was with the company from 1980 until his retirement in 2005, and was President and CFO of the company his last 7 years, after the Founder died in 1995. When the founder's widow died in 2008, Howard became Board Chairman and was Trustee of the controlling bloc of voting shares of the Company, as well as executor of her estate. As Chairman of the Board, he dealt with the heirs' request to sell the Company. The sale to SOCITEC, LLC a French company that manufactures wire rope isolators, finally closed in 2016.

During all this time, music continued to play a role in Howard's life. He was a charter member (1958) of the West Suburban Concert Band in LaGrange, Illinois. From the middle '70's to the middle '80's he was lead trumpet in the Chicago Footwarmers, a ten piece jazz band specializing in the Swing Era music of the 1920's, 30's and 40's. They played weekends, at "Fitzgerald's" in Berwyn, and twice monthly at the "Raccoon Club" in Chicago. The band also played at Jazz Festivals and for private parties in the Midwest.



*Photo by Andy Rawls*

As mentioned, Howard joined Windjammers in 1984. He joined the Naperville Municipal Band in 1992 and was its Treasurer 1992-2005. He is still a member of that band. He joined ACB in 1997 when Ron Keller, WJU #492, was President, and was Treasurer of that organization until 2016. Howard has played with the Allentown Band on two European tours, and was with the American Winds Jazz Band on its tour of Austria, Switzerland, and France in 2000. This was a 17 piece band, and Howard also was in the 6 person subset that played Dixieland music. Those latter six still get together annually for a long weekend reunion where they'll play at retirement homes and/or restaurants.

In the early 1980's, Howard became an Associate Board member of a 300 bed hospital in LaGrange, IL focusing primarily on fund-raising for the hospital. From 1987 to 1995 he was appointed to the Governing Board, serving in various roles, including Treasurer, Vice Chairman, and Chairman. In that latter role, he participated significantly in the sale of the not-for-profit hospital to the for-profit Columbia HCA organization, when current Florida governor Rick Scott was their president. The \$85 million net proceeds from the sale were put into a new charitable

foundation, of which Howard was its first president. For the next 13 years he also was president of the "sold" hospital and responsible for liquidating the remaining net assets, including the hospital's self-insured malpractice liability fund. When that fund was finally dissolved after all the claims were settled, another \$3 million went over to the charitable foundation.

Howard and his late wife, Jan, had three daughters and a son. During their growing up years, Jan was a Cub Scout den mother, and Howard was a Boy Scout and Explorer Scout leader. He also served as treasurer for the regional Girl Scout council. In addition, from 1999 to 2005, he served on the Board of Directors of Helping Hand Center, a social services agency providing services to children and adults with developmental disabilities, with a stint as president the last two years. During his term as president Howard was instrumental in creating the Helping Hand Foundation which was formed to handle all of the fund raising activities for Helping Hand Center and to independently hold title to all of the real estate assets.

Jan died in 2005 in Lake Holiday where they had lived since 1992. Lake Holiday is an unincorporated community near Sandwich, IL. They had moved there so they could live on a lake year round ... but doing so did give Howard a tough 52 mile commute (one way) to work. He was elected to the Board of the Property Owners' Association in 1993 and over the years served as Board President and Treasurer. He still serves on their Finance Committee.

Howard married Mary Jo in 2007, and has since lived in Bloomingdale, IL. They have known each other for over twenty years and enjoy traveling, playing golf and spending time with children and grandchildren. He has four children, six grandchildren and a great-granddaughter, and Mary Jo has four grandchildren from a previous marriage.

We greatly appreciate Howard's 34-years of participation in Windjammers, and his significant efforts in keeping our organization's finances in excellent order!



*Photo by Andy Rawls*