

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Aldena & Rod Everhart, WJU #3240 & 1351

By Don George, WJU #3911

I first met Rod in October, 1986. He was the new CFO, Vice President-Finance and Treasurer for a publicly traded company in the tech industry, a company that was going through a major turnaround. Our spouses were first introduced at the CEO's Holiday Party but never got to know each other well until we were recruited into WJU. Professionally, our paths crossed a few times, but we maintained a distanced relationship via email that became more frequent in the last 10 years. Rod's and Aldena's love of and commitment to Windjammers Unlimited is infectious ... the rest, as they say, is history.

Rod, by design, downplays and de-emphasizes his professional career accomplishments as a senior executive. Perhaps most notable was his presidency of Lexis-Nexis with over 5,000 employees. When it was sold to Netherlands-based Reed Elsevier (now, London-based RELX), he joined the Bell Labs spinoff, Bell Communications Research Company (now Telcordia) as the EVP-Finance & Admin, CFO and Director. With their life's journey, Aldena and Rod have resided in various states, including Kentucky, Indiana, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, New Jersey and Texas. "Living all over has given us a clearer perspective about people, faith and purpose," the couple shares.

"It's a partnership," Aldena declares often, referring to their 56 years of marriage. "You have to be a team," reinforces Rod. This unassuming, humble, and very private couple have a rich life story, probably unknown to most Windjammers. Like all of us, the Everharts have experienced many challenges, some of which would be considered severe and intense by all standards. The strength of their relationship has carried them through the best and worst of times. They are grounded by their mutual commitment to each other, core values, morals, and ethics rooted in their faith and family.



A trip in the "way-back machine" reveals an incredible amount about this team. Their musical roots were planted from a young age and each came into their own throughout their high school years.

Aldena, a vocalist who has performed with the Windjammer Dance Band at Meets and Conventions since 2006, lavishes time and effort on her vocal training and experiences. Born in LaHarpe, IL to a farm family, her dad played clarinet. Aldena was bitten early by the musical bug and took up piano and also clarinet, but was especially keen on vocals. She entered her first vocal competition while in junior high school in Macomb, IL where the family had moved when Aldena was in the third grade. In high school, she and two friends (sisters) formed a musical singing group modeled after the McGuire Sisters, who, like Aldena had their start singing in their church choir. High school also introduced her to "some boy" but there was no special interest on their parts... for now. (Actually, Rod was dating one of the others in the trio!) The Pops Trio performed at county and local fairs, Rotary Clubs and Senior Centers.

Aldena has never stopped singing. As an adult, church choirs have been a foundation, but her avid passion embraces both spiritual and show music. In Louisville, KY, Aldena performed both show and sacred music with The Motet Singers. While in Dayton, OH, she performed with the Miami Valley Chorale and the show choir, Center Stage, and in New Jersey, she was featured with the Morris Chorale Society. Moving around has never deterred her from vocal performance. And, in every location, Aldena has fostered opportunities to perform vocally. Even during the Covid-19 Pandemic, Aldena has recorded with her church choir using virtual technologies, with amazing results.

Want to have some fun with Rod? Ask him about his historic Civil War Bugle, engraved "5th Reg'l Infantry M.N.G." (*Maryland National Guard*). There's a robust story about the instrument and how he came to have it as a result of being



an unofficial “adopted grandson” of the former owner’s daughter, a woman with no family and for whom three of Rod’s great-aunts sequentially provided for her care in her waning years. The bugle’s date was a challenge to prove, but as some of you know, Rod leaves no stone unturned when it comes to genealogy as he is an Ancestry.com addict.

Rod grew up in a musical family and it was, he says, “the biggest influence on his interest in music and performance.” Music for Rod was and remains a “family affair.” Rod’s foray into music began as a fourth-grade youngster, prompted by his dad’s weekend playing in dance bands. Near the end of 7th Grade, the family relocated to Sherman, Texas where Rod sharpened his chops. Subsequently, the Everharts transferred to Illinois where Rod, during his high school years, played in the school’s concert, marching, pep, and dance bands. Swing music was alive and well, and Rod and seven of his music buddies formed their own band for hire, “The Unknowns.” *Sugar Blues* was his signature piece.

In high school, the shy and quiet Rod, met this girl who was lead with a great vocal trio. They were casual acquaintances... until their College days. The University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana “was a wonderful experience,” reminisces Rod. “I played in the ROTC Regimental Band and the Marching Illini, and learned more about music... and myself.” Rod maintains an active presence with their Alumni Band as well. During the freshman-year Christmas holiday, Rod and Aldena (now at Western Illinois University), started dating, albeit a “long distance” courtship but certainly nothing like today’s globetrotters. And, they discovered their life dedication and commitment to one another, through thick and thin. They were married June 7, 1964, three days after Rod finished his final exams. Graduation came a week later.

Rod took his first professional job as a Cost Analyst with Ford Motor Company, but two years later was one of the few “experienced hires” recruited into GE’s aggressive Financial Management Program where he excelled. This began their life of relocations, based on business and career opportunities. Perhaps surprisingly, Aldena fondly reflects on the uprooting and moving of themselves and their young children. “It was like an adventure and you make it a positive experience. What better way to meet new friends and learn about different people?” Wherever they went, they always maintained their family contacts, visiting “home” regularly.

If you ever want to know Aldena’s and Rod’s joys in life, just ask them about family. Proud parents of two women, each successful with their own careers and husbands, they might share with you the stories of parenting, life highlights, and a few challenges. And, they do so with a gleaming fondness and the warmth of love that only a parent can appreciate. If you want to be lifted even higher by their caring and sharing, ask them about their grandchildren. Lane, who lived with his parents Bob and Susan in Keller TX, is pursuing his MS in Computer Science after graduating this year summa cum laude from Texas Tech. And their two Chicago-based granddaughters Sydney, almost age 13, and Stephanie, age

10, visit them every summer for a few weeks along with their parents, Deanna and Philip, who can work from anywhere via phone and computer. The pool at the Everhart residence gets a real workout during their extended visits to Texas.

It seems brothers Gary (WJU #1384) and Rod followed in their dad Jim’s (WJU# 1332) musical footsteps, all joining WJU in 1990. Some of you might recall their participation in the 2006 Des Moines Summer Meet where Jim was recognized as the oldest playing member there. Rod’s sister, Barbara, was in the audience. For us “newbies” (relatively speaking), it’s a further enlightenment about the history of Windjammers and the cadre of musicians who have performed at conventions, meets, and events.



Both Aldena and Rod have dealt with recurring cancer challenges. Their experiences have strengthened their bond to each other and their faith. During one recurrence in 2002, Rod had an “epiphany” that became his motivation to write his first original musical melody, *Universal Truth*. Warming up after a radiation treatment, he kept repeating four notes. Two hours later, the full melody was complete. Then flowed the words to this “celebration hymn.” Next came *Sunrise – A New Beginning* and his personal favorite, *Aldena’s Waltz*, a tribute to his bride and the first of his “circus-like” pieces. Those, along with 17 others, are the musical foundation for Rod’s **At The Circus** practice book. The booklets, available for Treble and Bass instruments, also include articles about the history of circus music. The couple donate the proceeds from Windjammers sales to WJU, totaling \$915 so far.

OK, Aldena and Rod: Why Windjammers Unlimited? Says Rod: “Where else can you find such an array of music: a galop, a march, a waltz, cake walks, rags, serenades, screamers... all are unique, all requiring proper tempo and musical nuance.” Aldena adds, “Traditional American Circus music has to be preserved; it is an important part of our musical history. Even if you are not a fan of the circus, the music itself can be captivating.” They remain truly enthusiastic about Windjammers and our Mission of preservation, education and performance. If you ever need a pep-talk, talk to them. They are trying their best to make WJU an even greater organization.