

SPOTLIGHT

John Wermuth

(Member since 2002)



Live Happily. Love generously. Speak kindly. Those words are at the end of every email John Wermuth sends.

As President of Heartland Management Group, father of five children (four boys and a girl), and 10 grandchildren, John and his wife, Marilyn have lived happily, loved generously and spoke kindly together for decades.

Born to teenage parents and raised in upstate New York on a poultry farm, John, earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Rochester (he was the first economics major at U of R to earn Summa Cum Laude) and went onto Harvard for an MBA. He met Marilyn at a mixer when she was attending Radcliff and he was working on his MBA.

John's trajectory to managing high interest-bearing investments for tax deferred income began at 16 years old when he started college. He served as his high school's valedictorian and left that same night to make his fortune in Manhattan selling women's shoes on 34th street. Throughout college he helped earn his keep selling women's shoes. He joined the U.S. Navy at 18. While the main shooting had stopped by the time he entered the War, his real interest was in qualifying for the G.I. bill so he could continue his education. His choice of military was based on his overall goal of a college education. He first visited the Army recruiter who indicated he would need to make a four-year commitment to Uncle Sam if he wanted to be in the Army.

He went to the Navy recruiter who said they would want six years of service. However, if John could pass the Eddy Test he'd only have to sign up for two years. The Eddy Test was the commonly used name for a classification examination given throughout WWII, as a means of identifying men with the capability and aptitude to be trained as an Electronics Maintenance Technician for the Navy or Marines. The official name was Radio Technician Selection Test (RTST), but this designation was rarely used. Passing the Eddy Test served as the passport to the Electronics Training Program, possibly the best technical training program then available in the Armed Services. He took the test and passed, not knowing at the time he had an aptitude for electronics. He served in the Navy for two years at the submarine base in New London, Connecticut.

Prior to creating Heartland in 1984, and ultimately working with more than 120 clients, John served as the Chief Financial Officer for several well-known and highly respected companies, including American Medical Buildings, Applied Power and the Wehr Corporation. He and Marilyn were living in Port Huron, Michigan, when they came to Milwaukee to interview with Bill Brumder about Applied Power (now Actuant). Mr. Brumder told the couple the plant was in West Allis. This caused a bit of a pause, because John and Marilyn heard “West Dallas,” rather than “Allis” and wondered how they were going to drive to Dallas to tour the plant? Obviously, that misunderstanding was cleared up quickly.

Just like his diverse investment portfolio, John’s children have a variety of career paths, some in business, a son who is a musician and composer for corporate shows, lives in Dallas, others are in Utah, Texas and Denver. Two live nearby in Mequon and Appleton. Four of his children attended Lawrence University with the Number 3 son attending UWM and the Medical College of Wisconsin. He is an Ear Nose and Throat specialist.

Up until a few years ago, John played tennis, he likes to play bridge and manage his finances. Now he spends a fair amount of time as Marilyn’s caregiver since she now uses a walker after having fractured her sacrum. He was chairman of the Layton School of Art trustees and helped support the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

John is comfortable with his political views as a Libertarian, dismayed at the governing class, the foreign entanglements and the power of the military-industrial complex. He served as a trustee of the Village of Elm Grove, confirming that dismay.

John and Marilyn live in Elm Grove.

He genuinely enjoys Rotary and served on the Program Committee and co-chaired the History/Current Events Committee until it ran out of healthy participants several months ago. He looks forward to Tuesday meetings and the camaraderie and speakers.

Tuesday Rotary would be perfect for John if even occasionally Boston Cream Pie was on the dessert table!



Editor’s Note:

Next week this column will feature Kristine Hinrichs. Rotary Spotlight is written by RCM Board Member (and its Sergeant at Arms) Barbara Velez.