

Member Spotlight

Dave Smith

By Ted Becker

Have you ever wondered the true definition of a “car guy”? Well, look no further than this month’s member spotlight, Dave Smith. When asked how many cars Dave has owned over his life, he said there have been so many he could not begin to count. Was it 100? “Oh heavens, more than that.”

Dave was born and raised in Kansas City where he went to Paseo High School. While in his senior year, he participated in a class project to take large rocks and spell out “Paseo” on the hillside in front of the school. It took the better parts of a couple months to complete since some of the rocks were more like boulders.



After high school, he began his longtime career as a TV and radio repairman. This business, either on a full or part time basis, lasted over 40 years.

Dave and Louise at the 40th Anniversary Picnic

Dave met and married his first wife Victoria Ann Kennedy a few years after high school. This union produced 3 sons. Tragically, Victoria succumbed to cancer in 1961, leaving Dave a very young widower with 3 young sons.

Prior to the birth of their boys, Dave enlisted in the Army Reserves. After a year of service, he was called to active duty just as the Korea War was breaking out. He was assigned to the Chemical Warfare Division at Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah, prior to what he assumed was to be an overseas assignment. As fate would have it, the company cook was injured in training and was going to be out of action for 6 months. Somehow, Corporal Dave was able to convince his company commander that his culinary skills would equal that of any of the finest chefs in the country. Either his line worked or out of pure desperation, he was assigned cook duties that would last until his discharge 3 years later.

A few years after Victoria’s passing, his youngest son, Gary, had a very cute young teacher by the name of Louise. Dave attended a school open house of which Louise was the

master of ceremonies. During her presentation, the microphone went dead. Dave sprung into action by going out to his truck, getting his electronics tool kit, coming back into the school and fixing the mic. Giving it back to Louise, she must have been smitten with this fine young and handsome talented guy.

They began seeing each other socially and the romance blossomed. At the end of the school year, she went back to her original home on Long Island, NY. Dave knew he could not be without this fine lady and proposed via mail. She accepted, they were married at the courthouse and honeymooned in Estes Park, Colorado. They have now recently celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary. Dave and Louise had 2 daughters and their blended family has 7 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren.

Dave began a life thereafter of burning the candle at both ends, the middle and the next one over. He maintained his TV repair business, he worked for the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), went to night school at Central Technical Institute (eventually receiving an Electrical Engineering degree) and coached his son's baseball team. Sleep was a pretty rare commodity for Dave in those years.

He was a Senior Design Engineer at the AEC working on the Thor missile program. His immediate supervisor announced that he was leaving AEC and going to work for McDonnell Aircraft Company in St Louis and wanted Dave to join him there. He took a day off work and went to St Louis for a job interview. While on his interview, he was able to spend time with James McDonnell (also known as Mr. Mac) in his office. During their conversation, a janitor happened to come by the office. Mr. Mac went out and spoke to the janitor inquiring about his wife who was in the hospital at the time. The man thanked Mr. Mac for stopping by the hospital to visit his wife, giving her a bouquet of flowers and a box of candy. Any man who would pay that amount of attention to the family of a janitor was the kind of man that Dave wanted to work for, so he accepted the offer.

His time at McDonnell was spent working with a team of 7 doing astronaut training on the Gemini program. During one of the training sessions, he heard a loud bang that shook the building. Tragically, a F101 Voodoo fighter jet was being piloted by two of the astronauts who were making a landing during overcast conditions and hit the top of Dave's building. The ensuing fireball hit about 50 feet from Dave's desk. Had he been at his desk instead of on a training session, who knows how that could have turned out.

Dave very much enjoyed his time at McDonnell and decided in 1994 that his 28 years in their employ was enough and it was time to join the "every day is Saturday" club.

So how did Dave develop his love of cars? His dad was a master mechanic on the Police Department in Kansas City and a 3 time Missouri state motorcycle racing champion. He drove motorcycles with reckless abandon which earned him the nickname of "Daredevil Smith". Dave was fascinated with his father's passion and knowledge of all things mechan-

ical and tried to absorb as much from him as a young boy could.

At the tender age of 14, Dave figured it was time to buy his first car. He found a pretty decent 1934 Chevrolet that was for sale for \$35, but would only move a foot in either direction. Telling his dad the problem, he diagnosed the problem as a key coming out of the differential gear shaft and lodging between the ring and pinion gears. At his dad's direction, Dave got a new woodruff key and fixed the car in the owner's driveway completing the transaction.

From that time on, he was hooked on cars. He has owned cars of most manufacturers, but Buicks hold a special place in his heart. While in high school, he bought a 32 Buick Roadster for \$37.50 that had a large hole in the water jacket manifold along the side of the block. He made a new manifold in shop class and fitted it to his prized Buick. Shortly thereafter, he sold that Buick for \$300 and moved on to more and more cars. All told, he figures he has owned around a half dozen Buicks.

Dave also has had a passion for Model A Fords. He figures that he has owned about 30 of them through the years. His most recent Model A was a 1930 Deluxe coupe with dual side-mounts and a rumble seat. Over the course of his 20 years of ownership, he drove the car about 100,000 miles. His longest distance was to a national meet in Breckenridge, Colorado. He only sold that car about 3 years ago to one of his brother Shiners who uses it mostly for parades.

At one time, Dave owned 15 cars. One day, Louise told Dave, "Dave, you have got to sell some of those cars." Her idea of an ideal fleet size and Dave's, differed substantially, but he did pare it down to 7. He now has his 2013 Buick LaCrosse as his daily driver, a 1994 Lincoln Town Car with 17,000 original miles and a very cool 1998 Jaguar XJ8 roadster.

Dave's interest in life extends far beyond cars. He belongs to over a dozen clubs of various interests. The variety of clubs includes: Jazz music, radio, railroad, cars and fraternal. He has been a 60 year Mason and a recently joined Shriner. His car clubs include: Archway Oldsmobile, Volkswagen, Show Me, Fords Unlimited, V8 Ford, Mustang, 3 separate Model A clubs along with our Gateway Buick club.

He joined our club after attending the National Meet that our club sponsored in 1997. Dave would probably not state his favorite club, but I'm sure the Gateway Buick Club is at the top of his list. He has been an "At large" board member for quite some time and is present at most club events. He attends each and every club meeting at Sports Café and is the first person there. He sits at the front table and greets each member as they arrive. We all turn to Dave at the conclusion of the Pledge of Allegiance as he loudly proclaims "Play Ball!!".

We are so very fortunate to have Dave in our midst, a man who has a wonderful and charming personality and who has never met a stranger. A true car guy and a very good friend to all.