



March 30, 2015

Wyandotte Distinguished Graduate Inductee



William R. Shepler Class of 1950

William Shepler distinguished himself as a dedicated business executive, a renowned ski instructor and a promoter of tourism throughout the State of Michigan.

William graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1950, where he participated in varsity football and track. Shepler was a proud member of the 1949 football team that captured the Border City League Championship, and went on to be named state champions after beating the revered Grand Rapids Union High School.

William Shepler attended Ohio Wesleyan University, where he earned his B.A. degree with majors in business and sociology in 1954. While at OWU, William played varsity football, and was a member of Phi Gamma Delta fraternity. After his university studies, William immediately began filling a ROTC obligation. He joined the United States Air Force, where he worked as an airplane maintenance specialist and earned his pilot's license.

Bill, as he was known to his friends, grew up working at his father's family business: Shepler's Mackinac Island Ferry Company. He and his children would learn the business as teenagers. With the death of his father in 1988, William Shepler would become CEO of the company. Under the leadership of Bill, the Shepler Ferry Company has grown into Mackinac's finest and largest ferry service. In 1993, the family added a freight handling service to their ferry business. Now Mackinac Island can be serviced all year long with supplies and large equipment shipments.

Bill was an accomplished skier and hockey player. With the family ferry business closed in the winter months, this allowed Bill to share his talents in many unique ways. In 1958, Bill accepted a position on the ski patrol in Aspen, Colorado. He also began a long relationship at Boyne Highlands. By 1960 he was a master instructor, presented training seminars, and was recognized as the examiner (certified instructor licensing) for the Central Division of Professional Ski Instructors of America.

Shepler also founded Captain Billy's Ski Cruise, which each year teaches advanced skiing skills to selected enthusiasts. In 1978, Bill served as chairman and co-founder of the Northern Michigan Ski Academy, whose purpose is to develop ski racers. Today, the N.M. Ski Academy trains over 400 racers annually.

Bill also sponsored several hockey games between the instructors and skiing participants over the years. He proudly remembers several Detroit Red Wings members who joined in those special events.

One of Bill Shepler's most enjoyable volunteer projects was serving as coach for the Harbor Springs High School ski teams for over 8 years. Under his guidance, the girls ski team won a State Championship in 1988—the first for the school! The success of Bill's coaching at H.S.H.S. encouraged him to work with the local Kiwanis Club to develop a skiing program for 1st – 6th graders in the city's elementary schools. The Shay Elementary Ski Program in the Harbor Spring School District is still promoting physical fitness and future skiers.

Over the years that Bill Shepler was busy with his family business and his work with the skiing associations, he also devoted himself to serving the State of Michigan and the tourist industry. Bill Shepler served as vice-president on the Mackinaw Center Chamber of Commerce and served eight years on the Historic Streetscape Committee. Bill was president of the Icebreaker Mackinaw Maritime Museum and also served eight years on the Michigan Travel Commission for several years. Bill Shepler was a co-founder of Circle Michigan and served as its president.

For his outstanding efforts, bill was recognized and honored many times. The Michigan Travel Bureau presented Shepler with the Disney Mouse Car Award. The Mackinaw Chamber of Commerce named Bill its Man of the Year. The National Tour Association presented Bill with the Bob Everidge Lifetime Achievement Award and a Distinguished Service Award. Bill also was presented with the prestigious Michigan Ambassador to Tourism Award for his years of dedicated service promoting "Pure Michigan".

William Shepler and his wife, Suzanne, live in Good Hart, Michigan and enjoy their three children and their families.