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Mike Wisneski : Alma Mater Award

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2009 Alma Mater Award

Mike Wisneski '63

Success can be measured in many ways: in one's career, family life, spirituality, service to others. Michael Wisneski "stands tall" for his success in all of these areas - and beyond.

Mike graduated from St. Norbert College with a major in Business Administration and an emphasis in accounting. Yet, he considers his entire education to have been invaluable, including courses he was "forced to take"- ones that "broadened his horizons" and helped him to become more knowledgeable in many aspects of his life.

A year after graduating, during which time he had worked part-time developing a physical education curriculum for grade school students in the Kaukauna Parochial School System, Mike took an accounting position with Packerland Packing Company. Realizing the need to computerize the Company's accounting system (a rather new idea then); he instituted a computer department that helped the Company grow. This, in turn, led to his doing time studies in the plant and then to becoming involved in negotiating union contracts for the Company. As the Company expanded nationwide, Mike was sent to different locations to start up operations and employ local people. After 27 years with Packerland, and "retiring" as Vice President of Manufacturing, he joined Green Bay's Renco Machine Company as their administrator, where he worked from 1992-2004.

Retirement just didn't seem to fit Mike. Shortly after leaving Renco Machine, he learned of some serious financial problems at St. Philip the Apostle Parish, his family's home parish. The Parish debt was rapidly increasing (it eventually exceeded \$350,000) and its school enrollment was steadily decreasing. After only one year of retirement, Mike was recruited to serve as part-time business manager for the Parish. At first, he worked diligently with the Parish staff and

parents to keep the school open, but to no avail. The Parish Board decided to close the school.

In order to reduce the debt, Mike helped sell off some of the school's assets, even to the point of his physically moving computers, desks, and other furniture for a sale. Next, he arranged with the Green Bay Diocese to have some of the debt forgiven. Finally, while searching for a tenant for the now-vacant school, he negotiated an agreement with the Green Bay School District to use the school's classrooms for its Early Childhood Programs. Mike's professional training, hard physical labor, and clear vision of how to resolve St. Philip's financial duress resulted in the Parish's now being debt-free.

No sooner had he helped eliminate St. Philip's debt than Mike began serving as treasurer for Heritage Hill State Park where he has utilized his numerous financial, managerial, organizational, and leadership skills to help the Park's development and operations - a serious need as State Park funding had been cut.

Helping others in need has long been a major part of Mike's life. For over 20 years, he has volunteered at Encompass Child Care's annual fundraiser for the "Big Event for Little Kids," and he has helped with Oktoberfest at the KI Center. Besides being a multi-gallon blood donor for the American Red Cross (he began donating while in college), Mike has driven for the Red Cross transportation services, including driving to deliver blood products throughout Wisconsin and parts of Michigan. He even participated for three weeks in a medical mission related to St. Philip's sister parish in Haiti.

Not one to overlook his alma mater, Mike joined the President's Task Force (now known as the President's Advisory Council) at St. Norbert College. In addition, Mike and his wife, Kay (who is an alumna of SNC) established the Wisneski Family Scholarship Fund to assist needy students desirous of a Christian education.

Of his numerous volunteering activities, Mike said, "The feeling I get from volunteering is very satisfying because I can help and do things for other people. I get to meet many interesting people in all walks of life and hear their individual experiences. It makes you realize how lucky your life has been."

Mike, the oldest of five children grew up in Menasha where he attended St. John's Grade School and Menasha High School. Although he was cut from his high school basketball team because his coach didn't think he was big enough to contribute to the team, St. Norbert's Coach Romie Kosner helped convince Mike to attend SNC and play basketball. Coach Kosner obviously knew something. Mike went on to earn the Little All American award in his senior year (one of only five such awards in the nation). Mike, by the way, scored over 1,000 points by his senior year.

On his way to practice one day in his freshman year, Mike met Kay Yuenger who asked him if she could be his mascot (as Mike recalls, "I didn't realize at the time she meant for life"). Three years later, he asked her out. They've been married for 45 years, and are blessed with three daughters to whom they taught Christian values and encouraged them to pursue a college education; all three daughters are college graduates, and have thrilled Mike and Kay with six grandchildren.

A committed husband, loving father and grandfather, respected community leader, and a loyal friend of St. Norbert College, Michael Wisneski richly deserves to receive the College's Alma Mater Award.

St. Norbert College

100 Grant Street
De Pere, WI 54115
920-337-3181
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