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In Market: Paying your dues and paying it back

John Fletcher Guest Columnist Apr 12, 2019



Just Jazz band
courtesy

Thanking a mentor

Through music

Musicians have to pay their dues.



For Bob Putnam, a Colleyville resident who happens to have a jazz band, he's paying some dues back – in 4/4 time.

The dues go back several decades to when Putnam was a young professional working his way up in the world of RadioShack.

After working part-time at a RadioShack store in the Boston area in both high school and college, Bob advanced to manage a local store. His success led to a promotion to district manager, which meant he would attend his first meeting of the Northeast Division.

There, for the first time, he heard a presentation from the company president himself – James L. West – who shared how RadioShack’s corporate structure would provide support to its store operations team.

“I had the opportunity to hear and then meet Mr. West at this meeting,” says Bob. “It was a very brief encounter, but his energy inspired me.”

They would meet again and again in the future.

Bob’s career continued to flourish, and he was selected as one of five district managers to enjoy dinner with Mr. West during another Divisional Meeting. “It was a business meeting, yet it was far more intimate,” Bob continues. “I had the opportunity to see that Mr. West was a real human being. His passion for both the company and its employees meant so much to me.”

Years later, Bob accepted a promotion to become director of the store communications department. While managing the messaging for the RadioShack store system Bob also had occasion to be the person standing outside the door to the board room during meetings of the board of directors. West was also vice chairman of Tandy Corp.

“I would see Mr. West walking in and out of the room during breaks and we would visit briefly. He had such a powerful presence, yet he was so approachable.”

Following Bob’s retirement from his 40-year RadioShack career in 2010, he joined his wife, Lynn, in forming the Colleyville based band, JUST JAZZ. Bob’s grandfather had played in a big band/jazz group during the 1940s and his father formed his own jazz band as well.

Being from such a musical family, it was only natural that Bob would take up a musical instrument – the piano. “My father was relentless about me learning the piano, but I grew bored of playing classical pieces. I wanted to play jazz just as he did.”

Bob finally convinced his father to allow him to play drums – with the stipulation that he could not forsake the piano. He kept playing drums until he made a realization: It took a lot of effort to carry all those drums into a music venue, while all he had to carry as a pianist was his music. He returned to the piano.

It turned out Bob was not the only musician in his family, as his wife, Lynn had taken up the flute at her father's urging.

One day, their music passion became even more meaningful when they visited Lynn's mother, who was suffering from dementia, in a Boston nursing home.

"Lynn took her flute and I sat at the home's piano. Once we began to play old favorites from the 1920s and '30s such as 'Stardust,' Lynn's mother became so excited. The next thing we knew, all these senior citizens came into the room to hear the music from fond times in their lives.



"There we were, almost in tears, as we saw these seniors taking to the dance floor – some with their walkers, others in wheelchairs. There is no higher compliment to a band than to see a full dance floor. It gets the band riled up to see the audience dance to our music."

Bob recently discovered what the James L. West Center has taught for years through its dementia-friendly music therapy program – that familiar music from a person's youth resonates in the minds of dementia patients and brings immediate memories and joy to their hearts.

Bob and Lynn are bringing Just Jazz to the West Center on April 16 for a private concert for the facility's residents and families as part of the Nina Maria Cole Music and Arts Series, which is Fort Worth's only dementia-friendly music series.

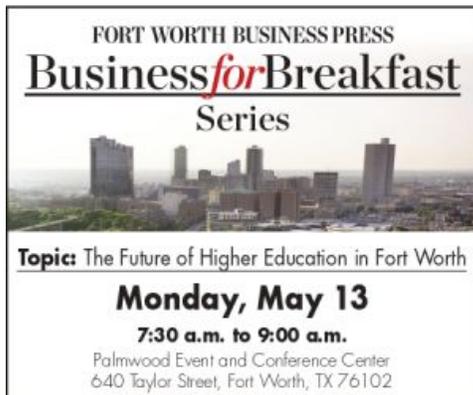
"We are bringing joy and memories to seniors through our music today, just as we did for Lynn's mother for years," adds Bob. "We love how our music makes them tap their toes, hum and sing along, and even dance."

By the way, Bob and Lynn continued a long-distance relationship with Lynn's mother for years between their visits to Boston. They brought her favorite music to her every Tuesday evening during their practice sessions via Facetime until she passed away two years ago.

“Studies have shown the remarkable benefits of music on the cognitive functions of people with dementia, as well as stress-relieving benefits to their caregivers,” said Cheryl Harding, CEO of the James L. West Center. “For many affected by dementia, especially those living at home, getting out can be a huge undertaking. Thanks to the generosity of Gary Cole and the arts community, we’re able to make the arts accessible to the dementia community here in Fort Worth.”

Low-tech music met high-tech through the internet (interestingly, technology that RadioShack had always promoted!). This all comes full-circle in a way for Bob to pay homage to his RadioShack mentor, James L. West, at his namesake facility – the James L. West Center for Dementia Care. Those are some dues that Bob is more than happy to pay.

<http://www.justjazzband.com/>



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