

Bill Danner, longtime owner of Danner Boots, dead at age of 97

OBITUARY

By KC Cowan
The Southwest Portland Post

Anyone who went to Wilson High School in the 1970s knew the Danner family. They were hard to miss with their flaming red hair and freckles. They were, in order of age, Peter, class of 1972, David, class of 1974; Nancy, class of 1975; Craig, class of 1976; and Michael, class of 1980.

Their family lived just down the hill from Wilson High School, on Burlingame Terrace, on the corner of Terwilliger Boulevard.

Father, Bill Danner, was the president and owner of Danner Boots. Mother, Miriam Danner, was a teacher.

Bill and Miriam instilled in all their children (including three step-children from Miriam's first marriage to William Crary) a love of education and success.

Peter Danner works for Footwear Specialties. Nancy is a teacher in California. Craig is a physician assistant and an author of two books. David works for the Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission, and Michael is a Portland musician.

The Danner/Crary clan is now grieving the loss of Bill Danner, who passed away just after midnight on Christmas Eve. Their mother had died the prior month on Nov. 4.

"I think that he had spent 63 Christmases with my mother and didn't want to be without her on the 64th," said David Danner, about the timing.

Bill Danner was born in Chippewa Falls, Wis., in 1910. His father began the boot/shoe company there, but was a bit of a mess when it came to finances. Then a scandal forced him to "suddenly" leave the state, according to David, and so the family and company moved to Portland in 1937.

Bill Danner served three years in the Army Air Corps as a top turret gunner during World War II. He flew 50 missions over Europe.

Becoming a shoemaker was not

his dream, but someone had to take over the struggling business. He and his brother stepped up and made it succeed.

"Well, mostly it became profitable because they were running it like a business," said David.

After his brother left Danner Boots to become a lawyer, Bill Danner ran it by himself until he sold the business in 1983.

By then, it had become nationally known for hiking and outdoor recreation boots, as well as footwear for lumberjacks and those in the construction business.

One lightweight boot, the Mountain Light, became a best seller after getting rave reviews in Backpacking Magazine. Over the years, the company grew from six employees to 75.

Danner Boots gained national headlines when Bill Danner was asked to make boots for an elephant at the (then) Portland Zoo.

One elephant had arthritis and could no longer keep from urinating on her feet, causing infections. The zoo asked Danner to come up with boots to keep her feet dry. He did—size 31—sporting the familiar Danner logo.

Although a war hero and strong businessman, his children remember him as sweet and gentle. Family always came first.

When he sold the business, Danner gave each child a "share" of the company, which Nancy Danner Jeu remembers she and her then-husband used for a down payment on a house.

"My father was the kindest, most generous man I've ever met," said Jeu. "Every decision he ever made was ultimately focused on his family and, by extension, his employees who he looked out for like family."

Michael Danner noted the generosity of his father. "The only thing he ever bought for himself was a new car every five years or so, which his kids would generally proceed to ding up even before the new car smell was gone," Michael remembers. "He never got mad about it though. Just the way he was—a very kind man."

Peter Danner, senior development



Bill Danner sits with his wife of 64 years, Miriam, surrounded by their family. (Photo courtesy of KC Cowan)

manager for Avenger Work Boots, said his father truly was part of the "Greatest Generation."

"The war, family, business. He put eight kids through college. Yet, he was the most humble man you could meet," Peter said. "I visited him the night before he died. He was just his old sweet self. We'll miss them both."

Bill Danner is survived by seven of his eight children, 19 grandchildren,

17 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild. He is also beloved by numerous AFS exchange students and "unofficial extra kids" (including this writer), who he and his wife considered just more members of the Danner family.

In February, the family will hold a memorial gathering at Willamette Manor, where both Bill and Miriam lived their final years.

SELLWOOD BRIDGE

(Continued from Page 1)

Cannon reported that the project's commitment to an open, transparent public process and a collaborative funding approach helped create momentum to push the project from an unfunded problem to a completed new bridge.

"More than 300 apprentices worked more than 139,000 total hours on the project," said Mike Baker, of David Evans and Associates, the project owner's representative. "The project's total workforce included 28 percent minority employees, above our goal, and 13 percent females, which was slightly under our goal."

Baker said that the project came in a little over budget which was \$325.1 million about 5.7 per cent above the 2012 pre-construction estimate.

Cannon noted a variety of innovations including public involvement of community members, business owners, and school children.

"Moving the (old) bridge and pursuing Green Roads certification for the project's sustainability features was another novelty," Baker added.

Baker announced that the new Sellwood Bridge had just received the 2017 American Council for Engineering Companies "Project of the Year" award.

For project information and a history of the project, visit www.sellwoodbridge.org.

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