

This monthly article highlights one of our branch members. We hope that you enjoy knowing a little more about your fellow members and the interesting life they have had. If you have someone you would like to nominate or if you would like to help author an article, please email the editor, Ron Nakamoto, at [ron.nakamoto\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:ron.nakamoto(at)yahoo.com).

JAMES SCHLATTER



Did you know that this member was an academic scholar athlete?

- At the age of twelve he was ski jumping 35 ft. He competed on progressively larger hills and achieved his personal best jump of 122 ft. as a high school senior.
- He was a member of his high school and college golf teams winning the high school city championship in his senior year and co-captaining his varsity college team.
- Three singular “B’s” (one each during high school, college and graduate school) marred his academic career. Who do you know that considers a “B” grade a blemish?

When you meet someone you usually get a sense of the person. Meeting Jim, you immediately feel “at ease” and not threatened by his superior intellect or his athletic prowess. He is personable, quick-witted and attentive to your banter and when you depart you feel like you talked to a real human being. Here is Jim’s story.

My Early Years - “My father grew up in Madison, WI. He served in the U.S. Army in Europe during WWII. He never spoke about his wartime experiences. He became President of a medium sized company and lived a life of freedom that his generation fought and died to preserve for all of us. I was the second of three children. I grew up riding my bike everywhere with my friends – to play Little League games, swim in the lake, have a picnic in a park, or buy candy at the gas station. We swung from the limbs of the ‘Climbing Tree’ in my front yard. It was a wonderful life.

My Athletic Career – “One of my early athletic skills was ski jumping. I competed in tournaments around the upper Midwest through high school. As a college freshman, I suffered an ‘agony of defeat’ run – the one where the skier falls just before the takeoff and cartwheels down the landing hill. I was unhurt, but hung up my skis nevertheless. “During summers, my sports focus was playing golf. At the age of ten I took my first swings using an old wood-shafted ‘mashie’ (a five iron) that my dad cut to length for me. I pretty much learned the sport by observing the good players at our local country club and practicing to mimic their swings. I became good enough to play on our high school

golf team. Besides winning the city title, I also qualified for the Wisconsin State Amateur Tournament and made it to the second round of the match play finals. I then played four years of college golf and was twice co-captain of the Wisconsin Varsity team.

My Academic Career – “After spending eight years with the same 30 classmates at Shorewood Hills Elementary School, I joined a class of 400 9th graders at Madison Central High. My GPA at graduation was higher than 399 of them. Focusing on academics and golf, I really did not have much time for a social life. I was fortunate to have likeable chemistry and math teachers to encourage my curiosity in those fields. I left high school with my eyes on a career in Chemical Engineering.

“I enrolled at the University of Wisconsin as a Chemical Engineering major. After an intense four years, I finished first among the graduating class of 80 Chemical Engineers and was accepted into Stanford University with a National Science Foundation Fellowship. (*Editor’s note: The NSF scholarship is a most prestigious award providing awardees with full four year scholarships to pay for all educational expenses and a small living allowance. For perspective, in 2015 16,500 applicants competed for this award.*) Studies were intense but I still managed to graduate with a PhD in 1971. My thesis research focused on catalysts and catalytic reactions. A single ‘B’ (in Irreversible Thermodynamics) again marred my four year academic record.”

My Marriage and Family Life - “He’s not very cute, but he’s really nice.” That is what Mary’s college friend told Mary about Jim on the eve of their first date. In his own words: “In my sophomore year I was living in a dormitory on campus. Mary was a freshman in a dorm a half-mile away. A friend of mine from high school was dating a resident of Mary’s dorm and the two of them thought Mary and I should meet one another. Joe told me Mary was waiting for my call. (Mary confided to me what her friend had said many years later, noting that Marcia was only partly correct. Mary has yet to reveal which part.) For our first date, we went to see the newly released movie, *The Sound of Music*. It was the first of many good times we shared that school year and we kept up with the letter writing while I worked in Philadelphia for the summer.

“Our relationship flourished once we returned to the University of Wisconsin in the fall, and in February I proposed to her on the one-year anniversary of our first date. We were married in Milwaukee six months later and honeymooned along the I-80 freeway to Stanford. Flash forward to our 40th wedding anniversary. We traveled to England, and went to a London theatre to watch a stage play of . . .The Sound of Music! We will be celebrating our 50th anniversary with the entire family assembling back in Wisconsin this September.

My Work Career – “My first real job, other than caddying, was serving two summers as an intern for a professor in the Chemical Engineering department. Because of my academics and athletics, in my junior year I won the Scott Paper Foundation Award which included a summer internship at their headquarters in Philadelphia. (To the locals,

Wisconsin was 'out West'.) To experience 'real' chemical engineering after graduation, I got a summer job at a duPont chemical plant in Parkersburg, WV. On my first day in the lab the building shook as a 40-foot-tall reactor blew up outside and sent shrapnel a block away. Nearby workers were covered with soot, but were otherwise uninjured. That was my first taste of real chemical engineering, the part you don't get in textbooks."



Jim's post-PhD career started at the General Motors Research Labs in Detroit, MI. In 1970 the Environmental Protection Agency decreed stricter regulations for exhaust emissions that would take effect in 1975. GM had embarked on a research program to better understand how exhaust catalysts worked and how to improve their performance and durability. As part of the GM Research team, Jim researched and published twelve papers and was awarded a patent for his work. *(Editor's note: Jim was a part of the research team that recognized that*

the anti-knock agent tetraethyl lead that was in most types of gasoline would need to be removed in order for the catalytic converter to work. As you know, the catalytic converter was first installed in 1975 and has been an integral part of the exhaust system of every gasoline- fueled automobile ever since.) After nine years at GM, Jim was invited by his PhD advisor and a former Stanford classmate to work for a consulting company they had formed in Silicon Valley – Catalytica, Inc. In his 23 years at Catalytica, Jim's name appeared on 19 papers and 5 patents.

While at GM, Jim worked with 400,000 co-employees; at Catalytica he worked with 20. One of them was Bob Garten, SIR Honorary Life Member and Branch 35 Golf Chairman. In Jim's own words, "I first met Bob Garten at Stanford in 1968. He had a post-doctorate appointment with the professor who was my PhD research advisor. Bob went to work for Esso/Exxon and I went to GM. Bob joined Catalytica in 1977 and I arrived in 1980. Bob retired and joined SIR in 2000, and I retired and joined SIR in 2003. I have no plans to follow Bob anywhere else."

My Retired Life - Retirement has been good for Jim and his family. Their oldest daughter, Rebecca is a Lutheran pastor in Bangor, ME and their second daughter is the Administrator for a local law firm. Jim and Mary are blessed with three grandchildren, one of whom receives a full day of adoration every Tuesday. Mary and Jim attend Grace Lutheran Church in Palo Alto. Jim said, "It didn't take long for the pastors and church leaders to find me and give me things to do. I have chaired fundraising efforts and am currently responsible for organizing the teams to count and deposit the offerings every Sunday. I chaired the committee to create a Master plan for the church campus, and for the past three years have led the team charged with completing the first phase of

construction. Church construction is definitely not for the faint of heart, and it reduces your golf opportunities by a factor of two.”

Jim has served as Golf Treasurer for SIR for the last 12 years. He volunteered as the Trail Tips editor when Jack Dyer decided to step down. In 2009, he instigated the changeover from paper to electronic delivery of Trail Tips saving the branch a lot of money every year. Jim is a valued asset to SIR, his church and his family. His parting message to his fellow members; ”Life is full of opportunities to make use of your talents, experience, and expertise – don’t let them go to waste.”