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Giving Back to Education

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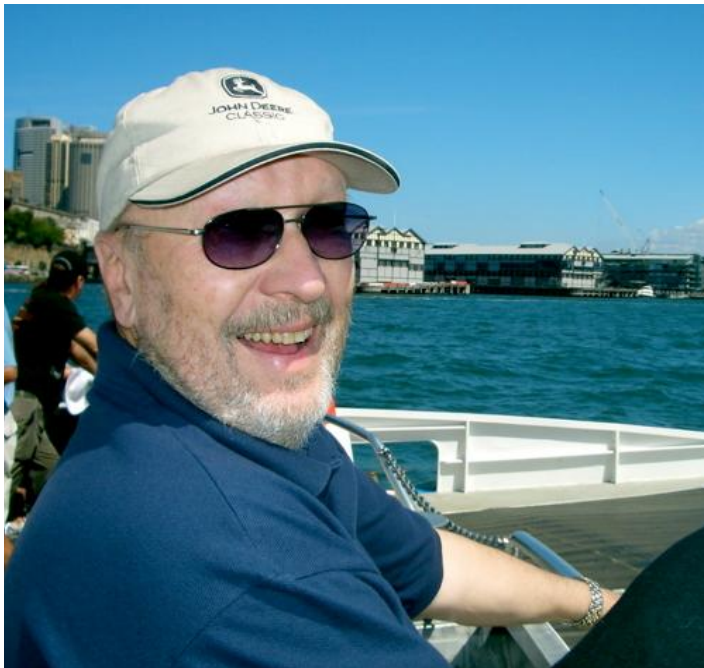
We also welcome your suggestions and comments. Thanks for your support of the HPS Foundation.

Sincerely,
*Teresa Kroll, Chairman
 HPS Foundation Committee*

Stan Miller - Class of 1958

Pioneer of Sound System Design Still Rocking It At 76

By Kristine Jacobson



Stan Miller - Class of 1958

Johnny Cash, John Denver, Dolly Parton, and Stevie Wonder. But, one entertainer - Neil Diamond - refused to have anyone else in charge of his sound system for the past 50 years.

When Neil Diamond first performed "Sweet Caroline" in 1969, Stan Miller was there. Throughout the decades, Neil has entertained audiences with great hits like "Song Song Blue," "Forever in Blue Jeans," and "America," and Stan was at each performance for the past 49 years, including Neil's 50th anniversary tour in 2017.

Stan Miller, who graduated with the Holdrege High School Class of 1958, is a pioneer in the field of sound system design and has worked with big names in entertainment, such as

The Early Years

Stan Miller grew up in Holdrege, ironically on Miller Street. At Holdrege High School, he played the slide trombone in the HHS band and was involved in theater.

He recalls his band instructor taking him and a group of students to Hildreth to see a speaker and amplifier system that was built by Verle Straatmann, who also later taught at Holdrege. "That sparked my interest," Stan said.

Another Holdrege teacher, David Meisenholder, also had an impact on Stan's future career. "He was very instrumental in me taking an interest in theater and the dramatic arts," Stan said. "Maybe that's how I got into rock and roll."

Stan developed a strong work ethic at an early age. He delivered newspapers for the "Holdrege Daily Citizen" and the "Omaha World-Herald," worked at the Dean Implement Co., and did custom hay baling for area farmers. "I always had an interest in all kinds of machines," Stan said.

He started his career in music and sound with a job at KUVR, where he played records, travelled with the play-by-play announcer to sporting events to read the radio commercials, and wrote radio commercials for area businesses.

After graduating from HHS, Stan said he took the advice of Mr. Meisenholder, who encouraged him to



Stan "on the air" at KUVR.

postpone college and gain some work experience before furthering his education. "Mr. Meisenholder said to me, 'If you go to college now, you will probably flunk out,'" Stan said. "I was not a particularly good student because I was interested in the arts. I was interested in music and audio and the equipment. I wasn't very interested in English. I certainly wasn't interested in math."

The teacher helped Stan land a job working at a hotel and ski resort in Sun Valley, Idaho. While enjoying the life of a ski bum, Stan also earned extra income by repairing audio systems as a side business.

In 1961, Stan decided he was ready for college, and he returned to Nebraska to study secondary education at Kearney State College. During college, Stan continued to work at KUVR in Holdrege and remembers entertaining Holdrege Swedes on Sunday afternoons with a special Swedish song program. He also worked at KRNK/KHOL TV and as a recreational aide at the boys' training center in Kearney, a job that convinced him that he did not want to work in education.

Through his involvement in theater at Kearney State, Stan met his future wife, Linda.

Although he was studying education, Stan's interests continued to gravitate toward music and sound systems. In college, Stan provided speakers and

amplifiers for musicians who performed at Kearney State. An agency that booked concerts at colleges around the Midwest hired Stan and a friend to help them with sound systems at other concerts. "They figured out if they brought a sound system with these acts, they would have a better time selling them to the colleges," Stan said. "That's how I really got started touring in the Midwest."

Meeting Neil

After college, Stan opened a retail store, Miller's Stanal Sound, in Kearney where he continued to build and repair sound systems for consumers and pro clients.

In 1968, Stan was managing the sound for a musical group that shared a concert with Neil Diamond. "Neil's road manager said, 'Hey man, can you do a show next week for us?' And I said, 'no problem,' and I've been with him ever since," Stan said. "Since that time, I have never missed a live concert." That number amounts to more than 1,500 concerts, and that's only after they started counting.

During that era, sound systems could not be purchased, Stan said. They had to be built, and Stan was becoming an expert in that field. He was one of the first to think of hanging sound systems from ceilings and became a pioneer in sound system engineering.

"I'm the kind of person when someone says you can't do that, I figure out a way to do it," Stan said. "That's true of things I've developed in the audio industry. We couldn't buy things. We had to build them. I've always said necessity is the mother of invention."



Stan at the helm in the tour mix booth.

He invented the "Stanley Screammers" speaker boxes that were used by the band Pink Floyd. He also built the first JBL concert series speakers that were the first to be rigged and hung from ceilings. He built road boxes 30-40 years ago that he still uses on tour today because they were built to last. He worked with Yamaha on designing control mixing consoles

and other sound equipment. About 20 years ago, Stan started moving into the digital domain, and now everything is controlled via computers. The sound system now at Neil's concerts is 1.6 million watts of digital horsepower and is all monitored by computers.

Stan had a small manufacturing facility in Kearney where he and his staff built this equipment. "I've been on the edge of technology," Stan said. In fact, a friend once told him, "'You are not on the leading edge of technology, you are the bleeding edge.' Even today, I'm always looking at new ways to do things."

Stan eventually married his college sweetheart, Linda. And, he continued to add more work to his plate. In addition to the Kearney sound-system store, he and a talented team of more than 50 employees that he had hired continued to travel the country providing sound systems for musicians. "I had something going

on all over the place," Stan said. "Sometimes, I would have 8-10 shows going on in different cities at the same time."

Stan provided sound services for other musicians besides Neil, including John Denver, Johnny Cash and Dolly Parton. But, no matter how busy his schedule became, Stan made it a priority to work with Neil because he was "very good" to him. Stan named his son after the superstar friend, and asked Neil to be his son's godfather. "He actually came to Kearney for my son's baptism," Stan said.

Stan and Linda also had a daughter, Cordie. The couple later divorced, but Stan said they always remained close friends. "We were happily divorced for 30-some years," he said.

Heart Attack

Stan's career came to a temporary stop when at age 37, he suffered a heart attack. He has been touring in Europe with Bob Dylan and returned to Kearney to attend a family funeral. He started feeling sick and called Linda to take him to the hospital. The next thing he knew, he was in intensive care.

"I smoked heavily and had a stressful lifestyle," Stan said, which were likely factors that led to his heart attack. "The day before I came back from that trip in Europe, I was doing something at the stadium in Los Angeles. I was in three Olympic stadiums in one day. It was like insanity because I was planning for shows that were going to be happening later."

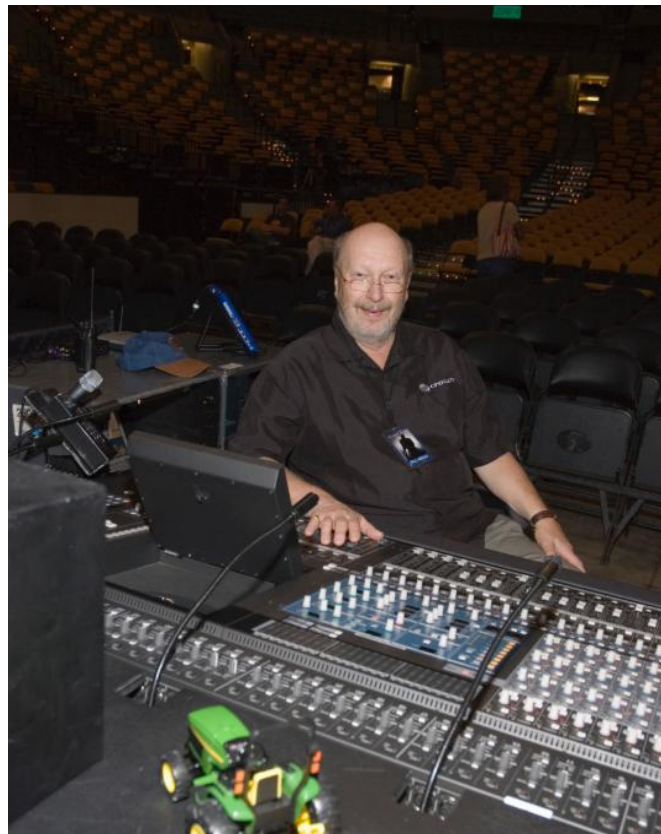
While Stan was recovering from his heart attack, Neil decided to postpone his upcoming tour (tickets had not yet been sold) until Stan was back on his feet. When Stan told Neil that he was ready to tour again, Neil paid Stan's Kearney doctor to tour with them for two weeks, just to be sure. "That tells you the kind of guy he is," Stan said about Neil.

Still Rocking at 76

Stan has enjoyed travelling the world and watching Neil grow into a super star. He started with Neil when his crowds were small and has now worked alongside Neil in performing at concerts with more than 180,000 people in attendance.

In the early days, Stan helped drive an equipment truck and load trailers to move a show to the next city. Now, they have a staff of more than 70 people and a charter 737 airplane. "I've watched this all grow over the years," Stan said. "It's been very good to me as a career. "Free travel, free hotel. Get paid. I've been all over the world."

Stan sold his sound company in 1998 and started a new venture while continuing to tour with



Neil. Stan had moved from Nebraska to the Hollywood hills in the 1980s and had a second home in Big Bear Lake, California. He and his partner



decided to purchase the historical Knickerbocker Mansion, which they operated as a bed and breakfast for 17 years (until 2014). He built a restaurant as part of the bed and breakfast and worked in the restaurant business as well.

"I'm always happy to come back to Big Bear," Stan said. "It's kind of like growing up in Holdrege or Kearney. I go to the Starbucks, and they know what I'm going to have before I walk in the door."

In 2009, Stan was honored with the Parnelli Audio Innovator Award, a prestigious award that recognizes pioneering, influential professionals who work behind the scenes at live events.

Stan still lives in Big Bear City, where he served on the board of the Southern California Mountains Foundation, a non-profit organization promotes environmental stewardship and offers programs for youth. "I'm very passionate about helping young people," Stan said. "That's our future. I think it's important that we do that."

Stan has enjoyed his "road family" over the years and is enjoying Neil's 50th anniversary tour that started in April and continued through the fall of 2017. "For somebody like me to have a career with an artist this long, it's almost unheard of," Stan said. "Neil is very loyal. There have been plenty of times when he probably should have fired me. That longevity is part of our history, and that's what I think makes the show what it is."

And, Stan said they have no plans of ending their long career together anytime soon. "We're 76 years old now, and we still rock! That's a good thing," Stan said. "We're not young chickens anymore, but, I've never heard him say the word retirement."

About Us

The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.

Holdrege Public Schools Foundation

505 14th Ave, PO Box 2002
 Holdrege, Nebraska 68949
 Holdrege Public Schools Foundation
 (308) 995-8663
holdregedusters.org

Holdrege Public Schools Foundation, 505 14th Ave, PO Box 2002, Holdrege, NE 68949

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