

## Paul Rogers

This week we are happy to name Paul Rogers as the 146th inductee in Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Paul Rogers was nominated by Don Schnitzler.

Local businessman, Paul Rogers, is an honest, straightforward, hometown guy whose big ideas, dedication and drive have greatly benefited friends and neighbors here in Marshfield.

As a high school student, Rogers was hired as an usher and worked with projection and maintenance duties for the local Adler Theater Company. At the same time, he was a member of the Parents-Youth Committee of the Marshfield Youth Council who used space in the old Adler Opera House for meetings and Youth Center events.

After he graduated from Marshfield High School with the Class of 1966, Rogers enlisted in the U.S. Army. He received his basic training at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri and advanced training at Ft. Lee, Virginia before being assigned to the Military Equipment Delivery Team at the American embassy in Rangoon, Burma, where he served as a general supply specialist. He received the Joint Services Commendation Medal for performance of his duties there.

When he returned to Marshfield in December 1969, he was rehired by the Adler Theater Company, now as assistant manager. A short time later the manager, who was originally from the Minneapolis-St. Paul area left and Rogers was asked to run not only the Adler but the Highway 10-13 Drive-in Theater and the Rosa Theater at Waupaca as well. He did so well that two years later, as Bette and Anne Adler were attempting to get out of the theater business, he found himself with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to buy the two Marshfield theaters.

At just 23 years of age, with the help of his parents, a local bank, a Small Business Administration loan, and of course Bette and Anne's full support, he was in the entertainment business. The sale was announced in June 1972.

The transition between owners was barely noticeable. Operations remained the same, with the only visible change, the renaming of the Adler Theater Company as Roger's Cinema. A few years later, Rogers started an ambitious expansion program by buying a theater in Wisconsin Rapids, and in 1977, selling half interest in the theater company to a friend, John



Koran, a successful Marshfield businessman. Koran brought in capital and provided valuable advice, but Rogers remained the active management of Rogers Cinema.

Rogers "twinned," turned a single theater into two, in both Marshfield and Wisconsin Rapids theaters. It became part of his operating philosophy, along with the use of matinees and staggering the times movies began.

Over the years, Rogers bought, leased and sold theaters, operating up to 48 screens in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. Today, Roger Cinemas are in five cities, Marshfield, Wisconsin Rapids, Stevens Point, Wausau and Houghton, Michigan, operating 30 screens.

As president of Rogers Cinema Inc., Rogers served as a member of National Association of Theatre Owners of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (NATO-WI & UP) Board of Directors. In 1995, he was elected president and national delegate of NATO beginning a 15-year record of service, making him the longest serving president in the association's history.

In 1996, Rogers envisioned great things for his flagship theater here in Marshfield. Built in 1937 as the new Adler Theater, he saw a tired, old building needing work and proposed a major downtown renovation project that brought that theater from three screens to seven.

Shelia Ashbeck-Nyberg, then executive director of MainStreet Marshfield praised Rogers' efforts saying, "his leadership in the development and growth of downtown Marshfield is contagious. He makes things happen."

He continued to make things happen when in 2001, Rogers on behalf of the NATO WI & UP donated \$50,000 to the American Cancer Society's Hope Lodge being built in Marshfield. The theater owners' donation built and furnished the recreational area in the lodge.

In 2004, to honor the memory of his wife, Mary, who passed away the previous November, he saw a softball field at the Central Wisconsin State Fair dedicated as the Mary Rogers Field. Mary was a pioneer in the advancement of women's softball in Marshfield. She was also the inaugural member of the Marshfield Softball Association Hall of Fame.

The following year, wanting to honor his parents, Adela and Lawrence Knutson, he had a memorial chapel built in the middle of Brooklawn Cemetery, a few miles south of Marshfield. The chapel has open walls, a cross designed into the floor, an alter relocated from another section of the cemetery and a large granite carving of Christ on the cross, which is dedicated in memory of Rogers' in-laws, Edward and Germaine Haley, his brother-in-law, Tim, and his wife.

Three years later, with Rogers leadership, funding from NATO, and support of the Hopperdietzel family the Veterans Garden and Memorial was also completed in the Brooklawn Cemetery.

In 2015, Rogers led efforts that resulted in the creation of Hardacre Park at the corner of Fifth Street and Central Avenue. He worked tirelessly developing the Park from an idea to the design, demolition of his old buildings and overseeing the construction of the park. Often working to seek the community's financial support through the Marshfield Area Community Foundation.

In 2018, Rogers led the initial joint effort of the American Legion Post-54 and Main Street Marshfield, creating the Marshfield Honor Walk, featuring lamppost banner displays honoring local veterans with photos and personal descriptions. That project is just completing its sixth year and has provided \$10,000 to the American Legion and \$5,000 for MainStreet Marshfield annually. Rogers considers himself fortunate, "to honor these amazing men and women who have fought for our country's freedom."

There have been many improvements at the Marshfield American Legion Building, in recent years – many of them, thanks in large part to Rogers' vision and drive. But Rogers is quick to acknowledge the contributions of others, saying "the generosity of the community is unbelievable."

Today, Rogers divides his time between Marshfield and a winter home in Florida. He continues to own the theater company with John Koran's son, Scott. Rogers is chairman of the board and Scott serves as president and CEO.

"Having the theater locally owned and locally controlled, that gives me a wonderful feeling," Rogers said. As for the things Rogers has accomplished, he said, "It's not about me; it's about our community "I do it because it's for the good of my friends, neighbors and community."