

William “Bill” Allen
Nominated by Thom Gerretsen

One does not earn the nickname “Mr. Marshfield” just by getting work done. In a world where business is not supposed to be personal, Bill Allen proved more than most that if you don’t build solid, positive, rewarding personal relationships along the way, true business excellence will not be nearly as easy to come by.



Bill (1930-2007) undeniably “put his all” into his four-plus decades as a WDLB advertising sales representative, and later as sales manager and station manager. He put that same passion into his community service as a Marshfield Chamber Red Coat Ambassador and his roles in the city’s Main Street program, convention & visitors bureau, Central Wisconsin State Fair, United Way Marsh Society, Elks and Eagles clubs, and the National Farm Medicine Center’s fundraising Auction of Champions.

Bill lent his strong, confident, talented voice to wherever it could be used. He was the “Voice of Dairyfest” as the lead public address announcer for many years at the festival’s two main events – the Mayor’s Breakfast on Friday morning, and the Saturday parade’s reviewing stand in the heart of the downtown on Central Avenue. As a talented singer, Bill’s voice helped provide blessings in the choir at Faith Lutheran Church – and of course, he sang in more than one commercial ad on WDLB. Later in his career, as more of his longtime friends and associates died, Bill sang at larger and larger numbers of their funerals.

The Wisconsin Broadcasters Association honored Bill’s body of work in 2016, when he became one of its first Local Broadcast Legends. He also received a host of community honors. And in 2004, he was chosen as marshal for the Dairyfest Parade that his voice helped so many people enjoy through the years.

For 10 years after his death, Bill’s legacy continued making a direct impact. His widow, Pat Allen, started an annual “Fore Bill” golf event which raised almost a quarter-million dollars in scholarships for Marshfield High School and Columbus High students who shared Bill’s love of service and music – and were interested in pursuing health care or business careers. That influence extended even further when a new golf event, aimed at helping families affected by Alzheimer’s disease, picked up where Fore Bill left off.

Oh, and about Bill’s personal relationships: I cannot help but think that one person’s remembrance would even begin to do him justice. But because I was asked to nominate him, here goes:

He never said the exact words, but Bill always told me not to be in such a hurry – even though fresh deadlines were always staring me in the face. Obviously, he told his sales staff the same thing. During one of my first days at WDLB in 1978, two sales reps wanted me to “fall in line” – and as I began speeding in my car downtown to my new City Hall beat, these fine gentlemen slowed their vehicles down to a crawl on both southbound lanes of Central Avenue. Yes, I got the message although it took years: Bill knew that pressuring people does not often generate the most ideal business results – and I was not about to get away with pressuring myself too much.

Bill was always calling people into his office – and not always because of the business at hand. Even as my direct manager late in his career, there were days when he wanted to hear nothing more than how my family was doing – what I thought about the latest comings-and-goings at Faith Lutheran where we both

worshiped – opinions of my favorite sports teams – and my personal & family travel plans and experiences.

I never realized until after I retired how much sense that made. Bill had plenty of experience to see what I was doing for our company. What he really wanted was a pulse of my heart and soul – the same type of heart and soul that Bill brought to everything he did.

When I think of him today, I think of how important it was to put my life into my life's work. More than anyone, he was a living reminder that when you cover the news, you cover life itself. I feel so blessed to have known Bill Allen – so honored that I can nominate him as one of Marshfield's 150 people who truly exemplified our city's first 150 years.