

Joe Jacobson to serve as rallymaster for Kaukauna Alumni Foundation

Serving as the rallymaster at this year's Kaukauna Alumni Foundation Rally is Joe Jacobson from the Class of 1973. A proud Kaukauna High School alumnus and treasurer of the alumni association, Jacobson is a former owner of Amusement Devices, located in Menasha, that has its roots in Kaukauna, having been founded by his parents, Gordon and Marjorie Jacobson in 1964 with a game room in Kaukauna.

He remembers being a good student in the classes he liked and having a lot of fun in high school and got to meet a lot of people. Fifty years later, he was surprised to be asked to be the rallymaster for the 87th annual rally on Saturday, June 17. "I'm kind of honored that she thought of me," he said, noting when he received a call from the Chairman of the Board, Kristine Landreman, "It never even dawned on me that's why she was calling me. I thought she was calling me to get my thoughts on other people."

Jacobson remembers a different Kaukauna than it currently is, with the north and south sides separated by not only the river but almost culturally. He remembers how fun it was to meet kids from the other side of the river when he got to junior high, then the high school, as well as the bus kids and those from Hollandtown.

He's a "northsider," going to Holy Cross School and Park School before heading across the river to Electa Quinney Junior High School from the family home on the corner of Grignon and Ducharme streets. "We lived in the Grignon woods and White City Park and the river," he said. "Like most kids those days, we probably played kickball or softball every day and, in the winter, it was football and basketball." There was also sledding in White City Park and over to Mount Misery when they wanted a big challenge.

He grew up in the family business owned by his parents, working for them starting when he was young. "They were wonderful parents," he said. "All of us grew up working with them. It was funny because for quite a few years we called them by their first names because we were employees and worked with them." Joe said he was probably in his 30s before he started calling his mother "mom" again. His older brother Michael "Jake" graduated in 1969, his brother Kurt is a year younger than him and brother Eric is three years younger. His sister Ann is five years younger, and Karen is eight years younger. "Other than my older brother who lives in Boston, we all still live here in the valley," he said.

He has three children — Sophia, Jamie Lynn, and Jordyn Marjorie — with his wife Linda, and they've been married for 30 years. "I couldn't be happier," he said.

He moved to Darby 24 years ago, and his children graduated from Kimberly High School and his oldest two never saw the Papermakers lose a football game in four years of high school.

When he was in high school, he got good grades in the classes he liked and not so good grades in the classes he wasn't too interested in. "Teachers had a lot to do with that," he said. "If there was a teacher who made it interesting, if I was really involved, I was a good student." He wrestled "not very well" his first two years of school because Dave Specht, who became an assistant wrestling coach, was good friends with his father. He learned more about commitment while wrestling but because he was working at a young age, he knew about that before wrestling. He had a Post-Crescent paper route that involved not only daily deliveries but collecting money every week. "You had to pay the Post-Crescent even if your customers didn't pay you."

The family owned the pool hall on the north side of Kaukauna, called the Side Pocket, which was open until the late 60's, when it burned down. A new game room was built after the fire. It was called The Phoenix, the bird that rose from the ashes. In a few years, the game room became a supper club and then became a tavern called Little Joe's, which was run by Joe. A number of years later, Eric took over and it was renamed The Phoenix. Besides running the game room and bar, Gordon and Marjorie started a business that provided pool tables, jukeboxes, and pinball games to local businesses. Gordon and Marjorie also owned a restaurant in Kaukauna on the south side called the Iron Horse which had a game room attached to it called The Caboose. Kurt Jacobson ran the restaurant once he graduated in 1974. After closing the restaurant in the late 70's, the building was used for a warehouse and a shop area for the game business before being sold to make way for Burger King. That area is now part of the Kaukauna municipal complex. The current business, Amusement Devices Inc., has been in business for more than 40 years.

A genuine people person, Joe loves running into long-time friends during his travels, especially at area restaurants.

He remembers growing up during an interesting time in the world where girls were allowed to wear culottes. Before that, girls had to wear skirts and boys were not allowed to wear blue jeans. "All that got changed before we were freshmen in high school

because someone sued the school board or whatever,” he said. “There was a lot of change in the world in the late 60’s and early 70’s.”

He listed his favorite high school teachers as Jerry Kudla, Bernie Hupperts, Miss Kallander, Ed Flynn, Jerry Kroll, and his math teachers. In junior high, he liked Gene Ploetz, Miss Church, and Bill Flynn.

After high school, Joe ran Little Joe’s on Wisconsin Avenue and went to Fox Valley Tech to learn a trade and was hired as a sheet metal apprentice. “That was an enjoyable profession,” he said. He probably would have been happy doing that for the rest of his life, but his brothers kept trying to hire him and he eventually said yes.

While he’s become a numbers guy for the business and the treasurer of the Alumni Foundation, he doesn’t have any formal training. “None other than Ron Margelofsky in high school and a lot of on-the-job training in business,” he laughed.

His dad had an accounting degree, and his sister is a CPA, so the business has always been blessed with good numbers people. “If there’s something I don’t understand, I have a CPA in the office and they can explain it to me,” he said. His niece, Lauren Van Ryzin, also a Kaukauna High School graduate, is also a CPA and works for the business.

Joe got involved in the Alumni Foundation when he was in Tommy G’s one night and Steve McDaniel and Pat Ryan came in after a meeting and started talking about the alumni and suggested he come to a meeting. He was on the board for a year before he became the treasurer. “I didn’t know Pat from Adam, but Steve was my classmate,” he said. Joe is now down to working part-time, when he wants to, and is looking forward to getting out in a few years, since the company recently completed the process of selling to its employees.

He still likes to golf, ski, bow hunt, and travel. Being this year’s rallymaster is a little daunting for him because he’s been to many rallies and knows it’s a big deal. “I like to talk, and I get along with everyone, but I don’t do a lot of formal speaking,” he said. “It’s a big deal but it’s not like I’m making a speech in Congress or anything like that.”

He started making notes for his speech in the winter and he’s been talking to classmates about high school to bring up memories for his speech. Above all, he wants to be entertaining. “I’ve found they were all good but in the early years it was a way more serious affair and I just find it more entertaining when they’re talking about the old times,” he said.