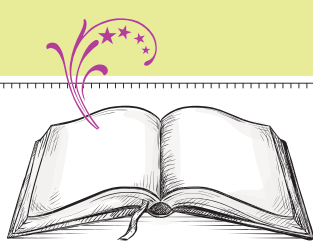


local news



VILLAGER BACKSTORY



You may know Wayne Zeman as an usher at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center or as your neighbor in the Village of Collier, but what you may not know is that he ran multiple business incubators.



Rachel Stuart | Daily Sun

GETTING TO KNOW WAYNE ZEMAN

Age: 74
Village: Collier
Spouse: Joyce
Family: Three kids and a grandchild on the way
Moved Here In: 2013
Moved Here From: North Royalton, Ohio
Favorite Villages Activities: Trivia, golf, pickleball, ushering at The Sharon

Wayne Zeman grew up in Cleveland and studied chemical engineering and management at Cleveland State University.

While Zeman kept his career in Cleveland, the impact he made reached far and wide.

After graduating with an MBA, Zeman started working at a company called Diamond Shamrock and was assigned to a research project that led to a safer and more efficient way to produce chlorine.

The earlier method of producing chlorine was more dangerous because it used asbestos and mercury, which are two very hazardous materials.

The research Zeman was involved in eliminated those materials.

"The research center showed that this would work, and needed someone to see if it would work on a larger scale," said Zeman, of the Village of Collier. "That's where I came in."

Now that method is used any time anyone builds a chlorine plant anywhere in the world, Zeman said.

No More Rusty Cars

Later, Zeman took a senior management position at Standard Oil of Ohio, and the company got involved in intrapreneurial businesses.

"What they would do was if someone approached them with a good business opportunity, they'd fund that business and let the person run it as if it was their own business," Zeman said.

From there, Zeman saw the opportunity to start a manufacturing company that produced electro-galvanized steel, which involves a thin coating of zinc that stops the steel from rusting. On a larger scale, it could be used to prevent cars from rusting, which had been an issue until then. The business took off.

"The first couple of orders I got were million-dollar-plus orders," Zeman said. "I grew that business to where it was on track to do about \$20 million in its third year."

But British Petroleum, a major shareholder in Standard Oil of Ohio, bought out all the shares of Standard Oil and ended involvement in the intrapreneurial business ventures.

Making an Impact

Zeman did research for a few years before going to work for Enterprise Development, where he got into business incubators.

Enterprise Development was looking for someone who knew how to take a technical idea and turn it into a business, which was right up Zeman's alley.

He then started two incubators that were getting some funding from NASA and the state of Ohio. He later inherited two more.

"A lot of the people coming in were very smart, but didn't have much business experience," Zeman said. "I'd be dealing with PhDs from NASA who were highly intelligent but had no idea about marketing, hiring staff or the legal things."

While it's impressive to be able to say he helped bring about a quicker and safer way to produce chlorine and a process to stop cars from rusting, Zeman feels good about the positive economic impact he was able to help make.

"We had an emphasis of trying to improve the economic climate and allow these good ideas to actually turn into businesses and create good new products and wealth," Zeman said. "It felt like I was making a difference to the relatively poor economic climate that existed in Ohio."

Zeman said the programs he was involved in fostered the startup and growth of over 150 technology-based companies,

which employed over 1,500 people.

A Busy Retirement

Zeman retired in 2009, and he and his wife moved to The Villages a few years later after being wowed by a visit to see his wife's cousin, who lived in the community.

"They had gone to Disney World and came to The Villages down Highway 27. Zeman wasn't too impressed on the way there.

"Then we got to Spanish Springs, and it was like casting my eyes on Emerald City," Zeman said.

Now Zeman and his wife enjoy an active retirement of ushering shows at The Sharon and going to Disney World.

"I usually play trivia about three times a week and golf three or four days a week," he said. "I play pickleball on the days I don't play golf. We keep pretty active."



Kristen Fiore

THE VILLAGES DAILY SUN

Do you know someone with an interesting backstory to tell? Email kristen.fiore@thevillagesmedia.com, or call 352-753-1119, ext. 5270

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