

2012 King Wayne & Queen Mary Lou

Written by Craig

Thursday, 09 August 2012 08:35 - Last Updated Thursday, 09 August 2012 18:56

2012 King & Queen

By Ruth Jacob

Reigning over the 125th Old Settlers celebration will be King and Queen Wayne and Mary Lou Alison. It is a very fitting honor because both have been involved with the Old Settlers Committee over the years, along with being involved in many areas of the community.



Wayne and Mary Lou met in Denver when Wayne got out of the Navy in 1953. He served in the North Atlantic on the USS Glenn, training troops and loading and unloading supplies on Baffin Island, the largest island of Canada, north of Newfoundland during the summer, and in the Caribbean in the winter. Wayne said he was very smitten by Mary Lou when he met her and when she went back to Middleton, Ohio to work for her grandparents, he finally went there to see her because he hated writing letters. The trip paid off because she married him in January, 1954.

They decided to start their life together in Halstead which had been Wayne's home since he was in third grade in 1939. They have five children, Dale, Dean, Karen, Sherri and Alan, and numerous grandchildren who love to come to Old Settlers each year.

Between the two of them they served on the Old Settlers Committee for ten years, but never at the same time. Wayne was on the committee in 1968 when the Harold Rea and Good Neighbor Awards were first given. That year the carnival backed out and the committee members kept trying to think of something to fill in. Harold Rea, who was a big Halstead

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supporter and owner of the Independent, had recently died, and giving an award in his name was chosen to honor all that he had done for the town. Wayne said that now that he thinks about it, maybe it was a good thing the carnival had backed out. He remembered having rides that were homemade and would scare the heck out of you if they had them now.

Wayne's parents had a flower shop in Halstead for many years and Wayne said they always had a float made out of flowers. They said that Halstead always has the best parade of any town around and they have always been very proud of that. The whole family used to get involved with Old Settlers when their children were growing up by having dart throw, penny pitching and wheel of fortune stands. Mary Lou said that at 25 cents a throw they usually made a couple of hundred dollars that was used to buy the children new clothes and supplies for the start of the school year. Their children helped earn the money and then spent it!

Wayne will always be remembered for being involved in Boy Scouts and Mary Lou said she, too, helped with Girl Scouts and Cub Scouts. She was a member of the Club Amicarum when they sponsored the fifth grade Girl Scouts. She said there were three mothers who had nine children between them and they would take turns babysitting and leading the troop. She said it worked quite well and she thought everyone enjoyed it.

Wayne was on the school board when it was decided to move first through third grades to Bentley. He said the board thought that the children would blend together better if they were in school from the beginning instead of waiting until fifth grade to bring the Bentley children to Halstead. Wayne added that there was one mother that threatened to shoot him because her little boy had to ride the bus all that way but told him at the end of the school year that it had been a good idea. Her boy had loved riding the bus and had made lots of new friends he wouldn't have had otherwise. Wayne was also a school bus driver for a number of years.

Wayne worked for AT&T for 38 years before his retirement and he had many stories to tell. His first position with the company was as a janitor for the switchboard office during his junior year in high school. The office was located above the building where the Loose Brick Saloon was and was in operation 24 hours a day until 1955. Winifred Koehn of Halstead was the last operator and Katie Munger, deceased for many years, worked for years and years. He said that Halstead operators would connect to the Newton switchboard and then calls were handed off to other locations, depending on who was busy. Newton connected to Kansas City and then to Chicago or New York or some other big city. The first switch, Halstead, would keep track of how long people were on the line so they could be charged for the call. A card was slid in a slot to mark the beginning and end of each call. He said that he read with all the calls being made today, every woman in the United States would have to be an operator to handle the load.

Dressing as Santa was also something Wayne did for a number of years. He likes to tell the story about teacher Lorene Frizell asking him to come see the kindergarten children one year at Christmas time and when he spoke to the class one of the boys said "That's not Santa! That's the voice of the man on the telephone line!"

Mary Lou and Wayne were both involved when the Housing Authority for Halstead was formed over 30 years ago, both as board members and director. Wayne also drove the transportation bus. He also drove one of the Halstead Hospital transportation buses after he retired from AT&T because he said Mary Lou wanted him out of the house several days a week! Mary Lou was active with the Hospital Auxiliary and helped in the hospital gift shop.

Halstead is a wonderful, resilient town, the couple agreed. Even with all the factory and hospital closings, it hasn't died. They added that the school is good and that children have had the chance to make friends with families from all walks of life. When the hospital was going

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strong, Mary Lou added, the doctors demanded a higher level of education for their children, and the school has attained that higher standard ever since. Mary Lou said that their oldest daughter Karen had always complained about how one of her high school teachers, Lois Loflin, would make her learn so much in English class. But, because of that training in English, she was able to do reports when she became a loan examiner, because she was so grammatically correct. Now she is grateful that Mrs. Loflin pushed her to learn.

Mary Lou said that almost everywhere you go there will be someone who knows of Halstead or knows someone from here. Wayne added that he was on a flight one time and was talking to the person seated next to him about where he was from when the guy in one of the seats in front of them turned and asked "Is Freddie's still there?" Freddie's was a longtime, popular beer joint located in a little building on the vacant lot at First and Main. Seems the fellow had been involved with the rodeo circuit and had been to Halstead several times when there was a rodeo grounds west of the swimming pool location. Close enough to walk to Freddie's.

We've been blessed with a good life, Mary Lou said. We've been married almost 58 years and have never considered moving anywhere else. She added that there are many couples who have been married 50 years or longer and believes that being in Halstead is partially responsible for that. The town is good they agreed and people look after each other. And, they added, Halstead is home!