

Dr. William Creason

https://www.google.com/amp/www.mlive.com/articles/14003305/longtime_grand_haven_community.amp



Dr. William Creason sits among several of the lights stored for the winter in the control room of the Grand Haven Musical Fountain in this file photo from Oct. 16, 1987. Creason died in his home Sunday, Sept. 21, 2014. He was 91. (KEN STEVENS)

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GRAND HAVEN, MI – He was a timeless visionary who saw the potential in the beautification of the Grand Haven waterfront. And though the music differs from the swinging tunes of Elvis Presley he so preferred when it opened in 1963, the Musical Fountain is a huge part of the legacy he leaves behind.

Dr. William "Bill" Creason, [a longtime Grand Haven resident, dentist and former mayor of the city](#), died in his home Sunday, Sept. 21. He was 91.

Born in Spokane, Wash., Creason was a dedicated public servant who was elected as the youngest mayor in Grand Haven history in 1957 at age 34 after serving on the city council for several years. He held multiple positions in Grand Haven city government for eight years in addition to maintaining his dentistry for more than 47 years.

Among his many accomplishments in city government, the one he's best remembered for is the fountain and grandstands in downtown Grand Haven bordering the Grand River, earning him the nickname "Mr. Musical Fountain."

The project was Creason's brainchild he envisioned ever since seeing a similar fountain in a nightclub called Races in West Berlin, Germany.

"A lot of people made fun of it," he told the Chronicle in 1987. "They thought we were desecrating Dewey Hill and they said 'who wants a fountain, anyway.'"

The Musical Fountain was created in collaboration between Creason and designer Bill Booth. Through donations of nearly \$17,000 along with the usage of used parts and donated labor time, the fountain was erected in the Grand Haven area. Since it debuted more than four decades ago, the Musical Fountain has continued to be a popular tourist attraction, as area civic leader Charles (C.K.) Bugielski predicted it would be at an Elks Civic Award ceremony to honor Creason in March 1963.

Bugielski called the fountain "the greatest dream" of Creason's life, hoping it someday would be one of the United States' most popular attractions, as the Ford Rotunda was before it was destroyed by a fire in 1962.

This was the dream his son Dr. Kennard Creason saw for the duration of his father's life, as the two lived and worked around one another in the dentistry.

"He wanted something to focus down there and he decided a musical fountain would be a good thing," Creason said. "He got some people together and raised some money and they did that and it worked. A lot of other people were involved but his involvement was to start bringing people down to the river."

Creason was a graduate of Fennville High School. He attended Western Michigan University and graduated from the University of Michigan. He also was a military veteran serving from 1943-53 in Maryland, Texas and Germany during the Korean War.

He married his wife Mary Rawlinson in 1945. The two recently celebrated an early 70th wedding anniversary in the company of friends and family.

Bill and Mary had four children together: Kennard (Wendy), Steve (Aleta), Paul and Yvonne Creason. They survive him, as do his eight grandchildren.

He's been praised by members of his family, including grandson Kevin L. Creason, for the passion he devoted to whatever he touched.

"He radiated that very, very huge passion for his community and everyone in it," Kevin said. "Even up to a couple weeks before his unfortunate death, he'd almost crush your spine with every hug he'd give you. He was very considerate, very thoughtful. Really just a person I've done my best to model my life and demeanor after, my father too.

"Boy, he was something else."

Current Grand Haven mayor Geri McCaleb said Creason and his family have been "an integral part" of the area and his legacy as a city leader remains as strong as it's ever been.

"I've always heard when people speak about him, it's always in the highest regard in the vision he had for the community and the impact he had on our waterfront," she said. "I think he was a foresightful person with an imagination for what could be and the wherewithal to make it happen."

Reflecting on his father's life Tuesday afternoon, Kennard said one of the greatest lessons his father taught him was the ability to age, growing with the changing times and preparing to let things go – even if it's the music played in his beloved fountain.

"He was able to turn things over to other people he worked on his whole life," Kennard said. "I think that's a hard thing to do to understand that a thing might not be done the way you've done it, but you have to let things go.

"That's a good lesson for all of us."

<http://www.grandhaventribune.com/News/2013/05/25/Fountain-memories-3>



1 / 1 (courtesy photo) Bill and Mary Creason

Fountain memories

[MARIE HAVENGA](#) • JUL 21, 2015 AT 12:40 PM

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Creason, 88, is the wife of fountain brainchild Dr. Bill Creason. She was with Bill in Germany six decades ago when he performed dentistry for the U.S. Navy.

It was there that Bill first witnessed a nightclub attraction that would one day change the West Michigan landscape forever — a 12-foot-long, floor-to-ceiling dancing waters show.

“It was one guy doing a floor show that he operated with foot pedals,” recalled Mary, a Grand Haven resident. “It was fascinating, it really was. Bill didn't say much at the time about it, but he did go and talk to the operator.”

That image percolated in her husband's mind long after he left Germany.

Bill won a position on Grand Haven City Council in 1955 and became mayor two years later. He longed to clean up the scars that scathed the Grand Haven waterfront after years of industrial use.

“I always said you've got a perfect place for something special there over on the hill,” Mary recalled. “We did talk about that often. I thought maybe Christmas trees or something.”

Never did she dream that Dewey Hill would become home to a super-scale version of their Berlin nightclub experience.

Bill gathered the brightest and the best in the skill sets he needed for the project — engineering, plumbing, electrical, broadcast and fundraising — and set to work in 1960 to design and build what was then to be the world's largest musical fountain. He talked one of his dental patients, Bill Booth, into designing the image in his mind.

After a couple of trial runs in late 1962, the fountain debuted on Memorial Day 1963.

“Bill was always there,” Mary said. “We called him 'Bill on the Hill.’”

When her husband wasn't busy on the hill, he was programming shows at the Creason home.

“The whole family was involved because it would go on and on and on,” Mary said. “Bill would sit there and say, '21, 22, 23 ...' He would mark a change for the fountain and code the different things the fountain would do, like the sweeps and height of the individual spouts.”

Mary remembers taking the kids to see the first trial run in November 1962.

“I took them down there in their pajamas, which a lot of the parents did because it was late,” Mary said. “We went down for this big opening and the voice came on (Ron Hartsema) and the fountain showed up. Little Paul said, 'Yeah, I know — 21, 22, 23 ...’”

Day after day programming, night after night performing, the fountain became part of the Creason family. Their kids — Kennard, Yvonne, Steve and Paul — spent a lot of time working the fountain, too.

“There was a little rowboat the kids would take over,” Mary said. “Paul is a big swimmer and he would swim over.”

The Creasons would often watch the show from the source side — in the midst of the spray, aircraft landing lights and blaring bass of the majestic music.

“It's a beautiful sight from over there,” Mary said. “I loved just sitting on the steps and watching. It's not fair because not everybody could do that.”

But in a sense, Mary is the mother of the fountain and Bill is its father. They gave birth to the summer icon that draws thousands of visitors from around the world every season.

“We're still very happy about it and glad that it's there,” Mary said. “So many people have contributed so much to make the improvements. The rededication Sunday will be a big night.”

Will Mary and Bill be there to join the celebration that begins at 9:30 p.m. at Waterfront Stadium?

“You betcha',” she said.



1 / 1 Tribune file photo/Marie Havenga: Ron Hartsema, left, shares a laugh with Dr. Bill Creason at the Musical Fountain's 50th anniversary rededication on May 27, 2013. Creason died Sept. 21. He was 91.

HARTSEMA: A tribute to fountain creator Dr. Bill Creason

[MARK BROOKY](#) • JUL 23, 2015 AT 1:17 PM

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It was a relationship which had its beginning way back in 1961, when I was asked to attend one of the very first meetings of a group known as the Grand Haven Musical Fountain Committee.

Little did I realize at that time that it was a meeting which would shape a major part of my life, and that my friendship with Dr. Creason and the association with the other members of that committee would influence not only my business career, but instill in me the true meaning of “giving of one’s self,” in whatever way you can, to the community.

As the youngest member of that group and just getting my feet wet in my own career, I was completely overwhelmed by the quality, stature and generosity of the people which Dr. Creason had assembled. These were successful businessmen, “pillars of the community” — each with a

special area of expertise and talent, and all truly dedicated to a project, which, in essence was “a dream.” Bill Creason’s dream, but a dream that each and every one of us believed in, and were certain that, when completed, would be an asset to the community for many years to come.

I marveled at the manner in which that group worked so closely and cooperatively together, always guided by Dr. Creason. Not only in those early construction days, but also during all the years that followed. He was a master at leadership, assigning the various talents within the committee to solve the unbelievable obstacles and problems which were encountered along the way, with Dr. Creason always working side by side with each of us, offering ideas for solutions and moral support.

There’s an old adage which says, “If you want something to fall apart, get a committee to work on it.” That certainly did not apply to the Fountain Committee! We were inspired, motivated and guided by a true leader.

In my case, I was assigned the task of creating what then-City Manager Russ Terrill and the entire committee referred to as “a real living personality” for the fountain, and to provide a tasteful blending of beautiful music to accompany the proposed equally beautiful colors and water formations of the fountain itself. The ultimate goal was to make “Dr. Creason’s dream” a source of summer evening enjoyment and pride for the community. From that first meeting on, and for so many, many years, I dedicated myself to the fulfillment of those requests.

I know there are 17 other members of that original committee, who, if they could, would also be as honored as I am, to relate their own thoughts and memories of this truly and incredibly dedicated member of the Grand Haven community.

So, let me speak for all of those committee members, who would join me in saying how proud we were to be chosen as members of that group and to say, “Thank you, dear friend, for all the good times, the inspiration, the friendship and the leadership which you provided for all those years; and to thank you, most of all, for permitting us to be a part of your dream. A dream, which not only became a reality, but will continue to be a living example of your dedication to this community.”

Dr. Creason touched so many, many lives in so many ways. I am so very thankful that he touched mine. It is with deep sadness that I bid farewell to the man I affectionately referred to as “My Creator” and say, as “The Voice” closed every fountain program for so many years, “Thank you so very much.”

Editor’s note: North Carolina resident Ron Hartsema, the original voice of the Musical Fountain, wrote this tribute for longtime friend and fountain creator Dr. Bill Creason. Creason died Sept. 21, 2014 at his Grand Haven home.