

## Earl & Carol Nelson

Nominated by Mark T. Nelson and Helene Nelson

A call from his father brought Earl W. Nelson and his wife, Carol Burnson Nelson, to Marshfield in August 1951. It was not a move the young couple had planned to make. But their positive response ultimately put a lasting imprint upon Marshfield — through their business achievements and wide-ranging community leadership and service.



Earl had founded Nelson-Jameson as a dairy equipment and supply firm in 1947 in Toluca, IL, with his father, T.C. Nelson, and two others. By 1949, the firm's slim revenues at Toluca were not enough to support all four partners. Earl and another volunteered to leave, as their college degrees made them more employable. His father T.C. and Herb Jameson moved Nelson-Jameson to Marshfield to access a higher concentration of cheese factories.

When Mr. Jameson departed in 1951, T.C. needed his son Earl to rejoin him. This was the fateful request Earl and Carol would not refuse.

Earl threw himself into the work. By necessity, he became a traveling salesman, while still performing his share of office duties, purchasing, repair work, warehouse tasks and maintenance. He traveled widely in Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois and sometimes beyond. If he couldn't make enough sales by Friday, he'd keep traveling through Saturday night, always aiming to be home in time to teach Sunday School the next morning.

As a result of these efforts, Nelson-Jameson prospered. The facilities and employment at the Marshfield headquarters and branch locations grew, as the firm grew to prominence as a nation-wide supplier under Earl's leadership. It was named Marshfield's Firm of the Year in 1983. Earl retired from day-to-day work in 1993 and remained chairman until 1998. Through the years, two sons and, later, grandchildren moved into company leadership. In 2021 Nelson-Jameson was again Marshfield's Firm of the Year.

Earl and Carol modeled the Nelson Jameson idea of being "a Golden Rule Company." As the next generations stepped up, they continued this deep-seated company culture of treating customers, employees, and everyone fairly.

Carol's career was equally remarkable. Initially, she dedicated herself to raising four children, hosting two AFS students in Marshfield, church service, and supporting Earl while he traveled and worked long hours in business.

Carol then pursued a graduate degree in educational psychology. In 1974 she joined the faculty at UW-Marshfield/Wood County, where for four years she taught developmental psychology to students in both the joint nursing and physician assistant degree programs. She helped train hundreds of nursing and physician assistant students who appreciated her knowledge and gentle, but thorough, teaching style.

When a need arose at Nelson-Jameson, she left teaching to join the firm, putting together a company catalog, creating a personnel department, fulfilling various executive roles, and participating actively on its board of directors. Her skill in hiring excellent employees was a major contributor to the company's growth. She retired in 1993.

Another hallmark of the Nelsons' life in Marshfield was community service and generosity. This made an indelible impression on Marshfield, as well.

Earl was recruited to run for the Wood County Board to bolster local efforts aimed at establishing a two-year campus of the University of Wisconsin in Marshfield. The efforts succeeded. Earl served as a founding member of the UW Center Commission from 1962-72. From finding land for the campus to engaging with architects and UW contacts, Earl plunged into the effort with great vigor. The new two-year center opened for students in September 1964. Earl's service continued through the 1971 campus expansion.

Earl liked major building projects. He got involved in several, including the building committee for the county's Norwood Health facility in 1974. The treatment model was changing from a farm-based to an in-town residential program. The move to town was not popular with some residents who had fears about the mentally ill, but Earl was convinced by the experts that it was the right thing to do.

A third building project bearing Earl's mark was the First Presbyterian Church building in 2003. He scouted the site at Adler & Lincoln and obtained the owner's agreement to sell to the congregation. Then, he actively participated in fundraising for the new building.

Earl successfully led these major building projects while supporting the need for robust programming and services they could provide. He served on the UW Center System Board of Visitors. Through his local and state level involvement, the Center in Marshfield provided access to good quality, affordable higher education for Marshfield and local area students, as well as wider cultural benefits to the community.

Both Carol and Earl served actively as church leaders and Sunday school teachers at First Presbyterian Church since their 1951 arrival in Marshfield. Carol also performed in the choir and as soloist.

Earl and Carol put their faith into action through business, personal philanthropy, and other community service. They served effectively on many community boards. For example, Earl took on the role of President of United Way at a time when it was apparent a major increase in funding of that organization was needed — and he helped make it happen.

Carol also served as a member of the Marshfield Library Board of Trustees; a member of the Marshfield Public Library Foundation's board; officer in PEO; district supervisor for AFS; a leader in cub scouts, girl scouts and campfire girls; and founding co-chair of Volunteens at St. Joseph's Hospital.

Earl also served on the Wisconsin Arts Board; advisory boards for Mid-State Technical Institute and St. Joseph's Hospital; the boards of directors for Marshfield Chamber of Commerce and Citizens National Bank & Trust; and executive board of Marshfield Medical Foundation.

Endowed with natural gifts and brimming with vitality, Earl and Carol Nelson were determined to make the world and the Marshfield community a better place. Their ordinary mode was to think first of what's right for others, then go to work, bringing their intelligence, experience, and resources to bear on the task at hand. This pattern over the decades did make Marshfield a better place in many ways that have lasted.