

2012 - Citation for Long and Valued Service to the Assembly

Hal Knight

The Congregational Summer Assembly continues to be the place we love and want to return to year after year largely because this community in the woods between two beautiful lakes has so many wonderful people who volunteer their time and talent for the good of all of us. The Citations Committee is privileged to learn about these contributions, to get to know more about these wonderful people and each year to let you know more about the one who receives the Citation for Long and Valued Service to the Assembly.

We live in an era that seems to be consumed with instant transmission of information, with what is new or “just about to happen” seeming more valuable than what has already happened. But in the lounge of the Community Building a lovely quilt hangs on the wall that was made as part of our Centennial celebration. The centerpiece is a beautifully stitched picture of the Meeting House with ghostly figures in period dress going off in one direction while others in colorful modern dress are entering. The words stitched on it read “They led the way...We follow still.” The recipient of the Citation for 2012 is a man who personifies that centerpiece. He is a true bridge between those who founded the Assembly and established the values of our community and those who follow still.



Through the things he has done for us all and the way he has served as a role model, he illustrates in his own person an often elusive concept – “The Assembly Way” – **HAL KNIGHT**.

The Henry Hafner family came here in 1914 from Pilgrim Congregational Church in St. Louis; fellow church member W.B. Knight brought his family soon after. Hal Knight Sr. and Mariel Hafner courted during a summer at the CSA, married in St. Louis, and Hal Jr. was born there in 1920. When he was 7 years old the family moved to suburban Webster Groves and except for college and military service in WWII he has lived there ever since – since 1954 in the house that he and his wife Nan built.

Hal graduated from Webster Groves High School and then, in 1942, graduated from Purdue University with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. After a year working at Curtis Wright in St. Louis he volunteered for the draft, was recruited by the Navy, went through a 3 month training program at Annapolis, emerged as an Ensign and was soon promoted to Lieutenant j.g. During the rest of the war he served on the USS Weeden, a destroyer escort, in both the Atlantic and Pacific. He was officially

an engineering officer but he also was the volunteer chaplain for all faiths on board – Protestant, Catholic and Jewish - which tells you a great deal about him. As a sign of his versatility, he was the ship recreation officer as well.

After the war he returned to Webster Groves, joined the family business, W.B. Knight Machinery Company, and reconnected with high school friends. One of them was Bill Coffman whose sister, Nan, was 3 years younger and therefore had been somewhat invisible to the older boys during high school. She got her degree in Fine Arts from Washington University and in 1946 she and Hal met during a church fashion show when Nan modeled the wedding dress as “Bride of the Future” with Hal as her escort as “Groom of the Future.” Serendipity! They were married in real life in 1947 and enjoyed just short of 60 years together raising 3 children in Webster Groves and watching grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow. He passed many of his own passions and values down the generations and had two very proud moments when he pinned his own Eagle Scout pin on his grandson Christopher and later when Christopher graduated from Annapolis.

During his childhood his family would come from St. Louis for two weeks at a time, spending many of the summers at the CSA in various rented cottages or at the Lodge. Later his parents bought Peter Evans’s “Fernside” cottage on the South Shore Road – it was built in 1906, originally as a logger’s cabin, and is known as the first Assembly cottage with running water. With his friends Hal took part in operettas, painted flats and built props. But he had been a Sea Scout during his Boy Scout days and sailing was the activity he loved most, especially challenging sailing on stormy days with his good friend Bob Moller. There were times when Nan looked over Crystal Lake from their screened porch during a storm certain that she would be raising their three small children alone! And he would return exhilarated and beaming.

The things he did for and with the Assembly have always been a combination of quiet, behind the scenes activities on behalf of others and leadership opportunities that were presented to him because of his obvious skills and talents but accepted by him

because of his strong sense of responsibility and service. He spent many years on the Budget Committee as a member and as the Chair. He was also on the Endowment Committee, then he became a Trustee and was President of the Board of Trustees and Chair of the Executive Committee in the mid-90's.

We now think of the Education Fund and the scholarships it provides to both CSA and Benzie County high school students as always having been there – but Hal was involved from the beginning, working with Cynthia Marshall Hood and others to create the fund. He and Nan made no claim as to their golfing skills but they happily played in the annual CSA golf tournament to help build the fund and he recalls the great time he and Rudy Lambert had on Main Street in Frankfort soliciting the local storekeepers for prizes. He enjoyed attending the awards ceremonies at the high schools to explain the Scholarship Fund.

Hal was an involved and regular participant in the long standing “Tuesday Men’s Group” and was always an ongoing presence in and around the Assembly. He didn’t just use his skills as an engineer on his own cottage but regularly helped his many friends with work on their cottages. A volunteer activity that he especially enjoyed was acting as a tour guide at Point Betsie. He particularly liked to stay up at the light where he enjoyed telling the story of the light to visitors. A favorite Point Betsie memory is of the day he was standing on the balcony outside the light and found himself looking down at a spectacular V of geese. Nan shared his work at Point Betsie and took the map that was made of all the wrecks known to be in the lake, coloring and framing it to hang in the lighthouse.

Anyone who lives on the South Shore could count on seeing Hal every morning, rain or shine, cold or warm, walking his dog – first “Charlie Brown” and later one of a succession of Scotties. Together he and Nan would walk the beaches to Frankfort or to Point Betsie and beyond while she would find objects for use in her art projects, especially rocks (often large and heavy) and interesting driftwood (often large and awkward) for him to carry home.

He still lives in the 3 story house in Webster Groves, responding to the daily phone call from the church and then going out to visit old friends or others from the church who aren’t as healthy as he is and who can’t get out. He’s taught himself to cook so when helpful friends bring him dinner he can return the favor by baking muffins for them.

Hal lives his faith as a humble and modest man who has always led by example. It would be hard to find someone who is a better bridge between the early years of the Congregational Summer Assembly and the present with his ability to quietly demonstrate for us all what we mean by the “Assembly Way.” Hal, I’m privileged to present you with this Citation on behalf of the entire Assembly and your name has been inscribed on the plaque at the back of the Meeting House.

After the service Hal will be on the patio outside the Meeting House where you can greet him and thank him in person.