

ROCKET REVIEW

A publication of the Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools

Alumni Spotlight Tom Barker, Class of 1972

I am one of the fortunate to say I attended Northeast for seven years. When I was young, they had a school inside the high school which was called Northeast Child Center. I actually went from kindergarten through third grade there before heading off to Pershing for my elementary schooling. Then I came back years later for my high school days. It was quite an experience to walk around some of the halls as a five, six and seven year old with all of the big people. It was a great experience, though.

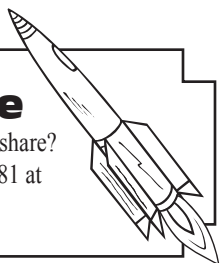
After that, I went to Wesleyan and graduated with a B.S. in Business Administration in the spring of 1976. At that time, I actually filled out an application to the Peace Corps and nearly accepted a nomination to go to Africa. But, as a 22-23 year old, I didn't think I was ready for that or dedicated enough to head to Africa. So, I passed and spent a couple of years working in restaurants, bars and liquor stores. I even worked for Bob Kerry at Grandmother's before he became a politician. We had some good times together when he was quite active at The Sun Valley Blvd. location. It's gone now. But, I got to know him pretty well.

After a couple of years of doing that, I decided I better "grow up" and get a "real" job. That's when my radio career began. It was late 1977 when I first got hired to work at a small station in Crete. I got my foot in the door and realized this was what I wanted to do. Luckily, my dad was good friends with Steve Agnew who owned KFMQ and I interviewed with that station in mid-1978. I was hired as a part-time announcer and spent the next eight or nine years working my way up the ladder until I eventually became Music Director and then Program Director. Boy, did we have some good times at KFMQ over the years. Of course, it all ended when the Agnew family sold the station to a company out of Dubuque, Iowa. After a short time, I was let go and started a new station in the market called KLDZ. Ironically, the partners in this venture were all former management people from KFMQ. I worked there for about six years and then spent a year at The Eagle before realizing I didn't like the situation on in the Lincoln market. I got out after a 14 or 15-year career in radio. I then was hired to work at The North Forty Golf Course as the manager and stayed with that job until the summer of 1998.

continued on back page

Something to Share

Do you have accomplishments or other news to share? Contact Kris (Surface) Beckenbach, Class of 1981 at kbeckenbach@unlnotes.unl.edu



Upcoming Rocket Reunions

Year	Contact	Date
1949	Betty Lundy Ward 402-488-6705 bettylw@yahoo.com	June 12-14, 2009
1958	Pat (McConkey) Doeschot 402-486-3862 patdoeschot@neb.rr.com	Aug. 1-2, 2008
1963	Jocelyn Dillow Baade 402-423-7234 jbgmb@earthlink.net	July 19, 2008
1968	Carol Urbom Hile 402-488-0335	July 19, 2008
1978	Kathy Moore Griesel 402-323-3784 kathy@haberfeld.net	June 28, 2008
1983	Lisa Jordal Horak 602-482-8102 horakjl@katewwdb.com	June 20-21, 2008
1988	Amy Jordan Wooden 816-523-8842 ajwooden@kc.rr.com	Aug. 1-3, 2008
1989	Jami Cleveland Toman jtoman@windstream.net	TBA
1998	Jessica Fraas Stilwagon jfraas@lps.org	Aug. 2, 2008

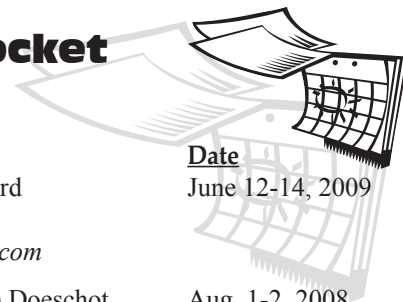
Log on to www.foundationforlps.org

**FOUNDATION
LINCOLN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

www.foundationforlps.org

5901 O Street • Lincoln, NE 68510 • 402-436-1612

Rockets on the web @ <http://lne.lps.org>



Alumni Spotlight-Tom Barker continued

I don't exactly know why, but I decided to apply again to The Peace Corps. Over the years since graduating from Wesleyan, I always told myself I would do Peace Corps someday. Something clicked and I sent in my application and was accepted for a position in The Caribbean!!!! How could I turn that down? I loved the golf business and was very content in what I was doing, but something told me to move on. I left Lincoln in July, 1998 for my new life as a Peace Corps Volunteer serving on the island of St. Vincent and The Grenadines. What a wonderful experience this turned out to be. I couldn't have asked for a better assignment or a better location. I worked as a small business advisor and was the Executive Director of The Junior Achievement Program on the island. In fact, I was so busy with this job that Peace Corps asked if I would consider staying on an extra year to continue building the program. I ended up staying three years on this island and would have stayed another year or two if they had allowed it. When I left St. Vincent in July of 2001, I also told myself I would do another stint in Peace Corps at some point of my life. I had a very positive experience and it taught me a lot about myself.

I came back home and as luck would have it, Jim White, owner of North Forty, asked me to manage the golf course again. I wasn't home more than a week before I started working at North Forty for the second time. If the business hadn't been sold, I would probably still be there. The closing gave me the impetus to look at Peace Corps again. I started the application process while still working at the golf course. We closed down at the end of 2006 and I was accepted back into Peace Corps for an assignment leaving in July of 2007.

When I was applying for this second adventure with Peace Corps, I was hoping for a location in The South Pacific or South America. My third choice was in Africa. And, the only place in Africa I was going to consider was South Africa. Somebody is watching out for me, I guess. South Africa was offered and I accepted. I've been here since mid-July and was sworn in as an official Peace Corps Volunteer (PVC) in late September. I had to go through almost three months of training. I have to admit this is very, very different than being in The Caribbean!! There are over 47-million people in this country. My training was a bit tough, too. Our group was assigned to live in a small village with some of the locals. I ended up living with a wonderful, 67-year old woman who worked as a domestic servant for many years in the capital city of Johannesburg. She worked for a doctor and his wife taking care of their home and children. She is now retired and allowed me into her home for the training period. No running water....an outhouse for my bathroom....hauling buckets of water daily to do washing, laundry and cooking....not a lot of amenities. But, it was absolutely wonderful!!! She was the neatest lady. We talked for hours every night about her life in South Africa and my life in the states. We bonded from the very first day we were together. I learned so much from her.

After training, I was assigned to another village called Jane Furse. That is where I currently reside and work. I have a very comfortable living arrangement. The little things now excite me. I've got a flushing toilet. I have indoor plumbing. I even have a microwave

and TV!! Again, I've realized we can get by without a lot of things in our lives. But, we're very spoiled and think we need a lot of material items to survive. I work at an organization that deals with a number of health and education related issues. We train people and help set up day care centers for young children. We have an after school program for high school kids in the village. We work a lot with care givers who monitor OVC's (orphan and vulnerable children) in the area. Sadly, there are far too many of these types. We do some work in the fight against HIV/Aids, too. It's very prevalent down here. It seems this office has training programs almost every week or two for the locals. It's a very busy office and I'm fortunate to be here. I'm still learning about the organization and don't have a specific job title or specific responsibilities yet, but will have a better focus in the next month or two.

My stay in South Africa is for a total of 27-months so I will be here until roughly October of 2009. If this stay is like my last stay in The Caribbean, the time will go by very quickly. I take things one day at a time, though. So far this has been great. Sure I miss my friends back home. And, I miss Lincoln a lot. But, I continue to make adjustments in my daily life in South Africa and all is going well.

I'm still amazed and humbled when I look at my life. I've really been fortunate to do the things I've done. I'm having fun. That's what it's all about.

As for a teacher or coach who had an impact on me at Northeast. I always liked Keith Leatherman, Terry Monk, Cathie Petsch and Hank Williamson at school. But, I would say my college advisor, professor and mentor who really influenced me was Dr. LaVerne Rudell. To this day, I consider her a very dear friend who guided me through my days at Wesleyan.

Regarding my interaction with classmates from school, I still am in very close contact with numerous friends. Some of my best friends are from elementary school, too. We grew up together. Many others were from junior high school at Mickle and the rest from our days together at Northeast. I was on our reunion committee for many of our gatherings, so I never lost touch with classmates. I treasure the friendships I've had over the years and often times reflect on those wonderful years at Northeast.

Finally, comparing the education systems would be fairly difficult for me. I really didn't spend much time in the classroom in St. Vincent, nor do I here in South Africa. However, knowing what I do and observing what little I have I would say we are very, very fortunate to have the education systems we do in the states. In talking to some of the other volunteers in my group who are teaching in the schools, they are very frustrated and disappointed in a lot of things going on in the classrooms. I heard that from the educators in The Caribbean, too. There's a lot lacking here. I thank the heavenly stars every night for being an American and enjoying everything we have.

In closing, I've enjoyed my first three months of being in South Africa. I look forward to traveling and discovering what this country has to offer. Just like my stay in St. Vincent, I have already met some wonderful people in this country and expect to make many more long lasting friendships while I'm here.