



Pillar & Post

"It's Been a Good Life" – Paul Connell



Raised in Trinidad, Paul Connell would come to Trinidad State after attending East Street Elementary School—and then Rice Junior High and Trinidad High School. However, after he'd completed his freshman year at TSJC, Paul decided to put his college education on hold to enlist in the United States Navy.

"All of this brings me back to 1954," Paul began. "I decided to join the Navy and I was initially stationed in Norfolk, Virginia—they put me at 'Weather Central.' We collected all kinds of weather-related data for the Navy. I liked it, and after about 18 months, I volunteered for a cruise above the Arctic Circle."

"You have to remember," Paul explained, "these were the days of rocket infancy. I was serving in the air-weather branch, so we'd send up weather balloon soundings before and after each rocket launch. We gathered information to help with future planning. It all was very interesting."

Not long after finishing his Arctic mission in the north, Paul was soon sent to the Middle East.



"The US Government was interested because of this constant thing with oil," he explained. "We were over there trying to charm the Arabs. I served aboard a ship in the Persian Gulf long before the average American even knew there was a Persian Gulf."

Paul would finish his four years of service aboard a light cruiser. "That part of my service was mostly uneventful. The highlight was a training cruise to Cuba and back, and I was discharged shortly after."

"You know, not everyone can tolerate being at sea," Paul added. "For some people, our sense of balance gets completely discombobulated—and then you get the queasiness and all that good stuff. But for a dry land kid like me, I took to the sea quite well."



During his first year at Trinidad State—immediately before joining the Navy—Paul had developed a strong interest in aviation.

“The College had an arrangement with the flight instructor at the local airport. That’s when Perry and Margaret Stokes were running everything,” he said. “That was back when Trinidad used to have two small commercial flights daily, something that’s hard to imagine now.”

“Anyway, the school used to split instructional fees—I think it was like 50-50 with the airport, so I took advantage of that,” Paul continued. “I’d actually earned my private pilot license before I joined the Navy, but I had a sinus issue which kept me from flying for the Navy.”

After being discharged and returning to Trinidad State, Paul resumed his classes. Initially, he considered finishing his degree and then heading to Boulder to study Political Science at CU.

“Morris Taylor made quite an impression on me at Trinidad State,” he said. “He got me thinking about politics. He was a very knowledgeable instructor.”

“One thing I’ll never forget,” he said, smiling, “—Mr. Taylor had this favorite practice of springing impromptu quizzes on us. One time he gave us a quiz that I wasn’t prepared for, so I wrote like five paragraphs of BS trying to convince him I knew something about his question. Of course, I didn’t, and it didn’t work. He said, ‘nice try, Paul, but no dice.’ It was an early reminder about being prepared.”

Paul was all set to enroll at CU after graduating from Trinidad State, but instead he got a job that summer at the Martin Company. He went to work building missiles. Paul would stay with Martin for the next six years, where he would meet his future wife, Bonnie.

“She worked in the Communications department,” he said. “We were married for 40 years, until she passed away in 2005.”

After the Martin contract ran out for the missile Paul was building, he needed to find a new job. “That was when my little Associate’s degree from Trinidad State really helped,” he said. “I ended up going to work for the AC Nielson Company, which did the television ratings. That degree was a requirement. I never would have been hired without it.”

Paul would stay with AC Nielson for the next eight years, before setting out on his own.

“I guess after a while I just got tired of being a company man,” he said. “I figured if I was working this hard, I would be better off in the long run working for myself.”

Initially, Paul thought he would buy a hardware store, but he uncovered a better opportunity and purchased a liquor store in Denver. He would own and operate his store for the next 15 years.

Although he enjoyed certain aspects of being self-employed, it also brought a different set of challenges—accounting, taxes, employees. “I’m proud that I kept myself and 4-5 other people gainfully employed the



whole time I owned the store. I bought the building, too. But the taxes were a big problem. They made things difficult.”

Eventually, Paul sold the store and thought he might retire, but he ended up starting a small remodeling business instead.

“My earlier interest in the hardware stores was part of it—I have skills in that area,” he said. “And after I sold my business, I started doing a lot of stuff to my house that I hadn’t been able to do for years. Well, my

bookkeeper saw my work and he had me do some jobs for him. Word of mouth took over, and pretty soon I had more work than I could handle by myself.”

“But then it kind of hit me,” he added. “If I kept going I’d need to hire someone, which would put me back into running a larger business than I really wanted. So, at that point I just decided to retire in full.”



“I’m beholden to Trinidad State for educating me—sometimes against my will,” Paul said, chuckling. “And that’s one reason why I started thinking about giving back. I’m also blessed to have enough money to contemplate aid for needy students.”

“As I was thinking about all this, I remembered an old life insurance policy—something I’d almost forgotten about. I don’t have children, but I do have some nieces that I’m going to remember in my plans. But with this insurance policy, I’m going to give something to Trinidad State, too.”

“It would be good if others thought about it, too,” Paul added, “if you’ve got a few bucks that no one’s going to miss.”

“If my gift can help a kid in need get an education, I’m happy to do it.”

Trinidad State is grateful for the generosity of Paul Connell. If you would like more information about creating a legacy gift to benefit the College, please contact Toni DeAngelis at 719-846-5520 or toni.deangelis@trinidadstate.edu.

“It’s been a good life,” he said. “No complaints from Paul. And if my gift can help a kid in need get an education, I’m happy to do it.”