

## Being in the Right Place at the Right Time

By Kathi Matthews-Risley

What can you say about a man who shook hands with Margaret Thatcher; interviewed notables like [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), Jimmy Stewart and Elvis; received the prestigious Air Force Commendation medal; and is a self-taught painter? You'd say this is a man of many talents. He was a man in the right place at the right time guided by God.

Meet Jack Foell. A new member to St. John's Lutheran. Jack and his wife Arlene joined St. John's in January 2011. They moved to Sauk-Prairie from Sun Prairie in 2006 to be closer to their daughter. Before moving to Sun Prairie they called Florida home.

Jack was born in Milwaukee. His family moved to West Bend in 1940 because his parents wanted the kids to grow up in small town. Jack's family relocated to Montana after West Bend, leaving that state to return to Wisconsin in 1951. This was one of many moves for the family and one that saved their lives. Two weeks after the Foells left Montana, a dam upstream from their home failed, flooding the area where they had lived. They would not have survived.

As a youth Jack always wanted to do radio production. There were no schools that offered that kind of training in his day so Jack worked at various stations in high school doing whatever jobs he could to get experience.

Jack found a path to his dream job when his family moved to Columbus, Ohio, the home of The Ohio State University. OSU had a radio program for kids, WOSU. Jack signed up for as many radio courses he could and eventually became chief announcer. Jack helped to create a news program for high school students while at Toledo High School. This was a radio program for juniors and seniors in public and private schools, some 400,000 students in all. This news program was still going 20 years later.

After graduating high school Jack stayed in Ohio. His family moved again however. He was on his own. He enlisted in the air force in 1955. He did basic training in Texas. His philosophy in life as been and still is "take what life gives you and do what you can." His administrative talents led him to further training in air operation and administration.

His duties included running dance shows at the Airmen's Club in San Antonio Texas. While in San Antonio, Jack experienced another twist of fate when Capital Records sponsored the 1<sup>st</sup> International Exchange of Big Bands from England to the U.S. Talents like Nat King Cole, Stan Kenton, the 4 Freshman, Tony Bennett and Elvis came through the club. Jack was there to meet them.

Jack was sent to Okinawa with the 51<sup>st</sup> Fighter Interception wing. He became a news announcer with the Armed Forces Radio and TV. He was the chief announcer and interviewed

many important military and civilian leaders of the day including Benjamin Netanyahu and Jimmy Stewart. In 1956, Jack was lucky to land a job working with Bob Hope and the USO. He met many great entertainers like Jerry Calona, Les Brown and Jayne Mansfield.

Jack went into the reserves in 1958. His experience as a news caster led him to a job with ABC News in Chicago and Milwaukee. After an illness stopped him from doing work as a broadcaster, Jack went into public relations and sales working for American Airlines. He stayed in the aerospace industry until his retirement to Florida in 1998.

Retirement didn't stop Jack from working though. He founded a news program through NASA which had astronauts telling their stories to kids in 34 states. That program continued on long after Jack left Florida in 2006.

Jack still didn't stop after his move to Sun Prairie. He created wonderful, Big Band Radio shows for his fellow residents in his retirement facility.

Jack has never stopped trying new things. He became a self-taught artist late in life. His advice to others would be, "use and share your talents". "When you wonder what you can do, ask yourself how can I serve God". "I tried as many things in life as I could because you don't want to sit back when you can't and say I wish I could have... or should have. Life is too short. There are no reruns".

Jack would some day like to write a book of his life. I asked him what the title of the book would be. He smiled and said "Being in the Right Place at the Right Time."