

Submitted by: Donald R. Tjossem

EHS Class of 1959

Alumni Stories

January 22, 2024



Don Tjossem moved to Ephrata in 1947 from Montana, with his parents, and started the first grade at the facilities at the old Ephrata Air Base. He completed all twelve grades at Ephrata, graduating with the class of 1959.

In high school he played right tackle on the football team in 1958-59 when it ranked third in the Statewide Associated Press class "A" poll. The last game of the year Ephrata beat Quincy 63-0.

While wrestling at the state tournament in 1959, he won second place in the 168-pound division at the tournament in Pullman, the team that had six other participants also placed second.

Don was regularly active in high school programs including science club, band, Thespians, and others, while he worked weekends and occasionally at the family business, Tjossem Lumber Company.

After graduating he enrolled at Washington State University and joined the Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity. His activities there were with the WSU Daily Evergreen, serving his last year as Business Manager. Not being certain of any career path he wanted to follow he declared General Studies with a major in sociology and a minor in psychology, graduating in 1963 in the top half of his class.

Following graduation Don went into the banking and finance field, starting out as a collector for Seattle-First National Bank. In this career he completed the American Institute of Banking Advanced program and completed the Northwest Intermediate Banking School in Portland. Mostly his career was in retail banking, seventeen as a Branch Manager. Part of his financial career was obtaining his Series 7 securities license and being a New York Stock Exchange broker in the early 1970s in Seattle. He completed his financial career as a KeyBank Vice-President of the Gig Harbor Branch in 1999.

While active in his banking career, Don participated in Mountain Climbing to a high degree. Upon completing the Seattle Mountaineers Advanced Climbing program, he became an Emergency Medical Technician and was the Chair of the Bellingham Mountain Rescue Council while he lived there. He assisted in teaching climbing courses and led climbs for the Seattle Mountaineers during this period. He earned the Seattle Mountaineer Six Peak pin, which meant he climbed all five volcanic peaks in Washington, plus Mt. Olympus. Mt. St. Helens before it erupted in 1980.

While being a branch manager of Olympic Savings and Loan he served as the President of the Greater Bremerton Area Chamber of Commerce. This was a remarkably interesting part of his career, which included lots of activities with the U. S. Navy, including a ride on the USS Ranger on a dependents cruise from San Diego to Bremerton.

Later he accepted a position as Branch Manager of Gig Harbor National Bank in Key Center. The branch, being right next to a fire station only made it natural that he would transfer his mountain rescue and EMT skills to become a volunteer firefighter, which he did for six years. Following that he was later elected Fire Commissioner of Pierce County Fire Protection District 16 by the voters in the district.

Later he returned to school and earned a Master of Science Degree in Human Services, with a specialty in Professional Counseling. This allowed him to become a Chemical Dependency Counselor at the Washington Correctional Center for Women and to eventually set up his own private practice, Key Counseling, in Key Center.

Continuing his interest in emergency services, Don took the tests to become an amateur radio Extra operator and participated in the Washington Amateur Radio Traffic System, The Alaska-Pacific Emergency Preparedness Net, and the Pierce County Amateur Radio Communication Services

After retiring from his second career, he authored six books for Arcadia Publishing Company, which feature historical photos and brief historical captions. Most online bookstores and local museums are selling his books.

He and his wife, Becky Alexander, along with their cat Alice, are presently (January 2024) living the retirement life in Longbranch Washington, following many visits to National Parks, Mexico, and kayaking trips, which included both completing the Portland Marathon in 1997.