

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Sandy Wheeler

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Family Memories Oral History project

Interview # FM-V-L-2008-070

Sandy Wheeler, who served as the executive director of the Rail/State Farm Golf Classic (LPGA) for 27 years, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Family Memories* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: October 9, 2008 Location: IL Information Service Studios, Springfield, IL

Date: December 11, 2008 Location: IL Information Service Studios, Springfield, IL

Date: January 22, 2009 Location: IL Information Service Studios, Springfield, IL

Date: July 6, 2009 Location: Rail Golf Course, Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Technical Support (cameraman, etc): Mark Suszko and Greg Bateman & Tony Lipe

Transcription by: Susan Burke, ALPL volunteer

Edited by: Marianne Lawrence & Rozanne Robertson, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 140 pgs Total Time: 1:57 + 1:58 + 1:58 + 1:06 = 6:59 / 6.98

Session 1: Sandy's life and career prior to her involvement with the Golf Classic

Session 2: Sandy's role as Executive Director of Golf Classic prior to State Farm

Session 3: State Farm Insurance Company becomes tournament title sponsor

Session 4: The State Farm Golf Classic at the Rail Golf Course

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on 11/23/2009.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Sandy Wheeler, *Family Memories*, FM-V-L-2008-070

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Sandy Dehner was born on March 12, 1939 in Lincoln Illinois and grew up there, taking every opportunity to use her considerable singing talents. Shortly after high school she married Bill Wheeler in 1958 and soon started raising a family and moved to Springfield, Illinois. Sandy worked in a variety of jobs for the next two decades, and in 1964 also returned to her first love, and became active in Springfield community theater groups, starring in many musical productions. Over the next several years, Sandy stayed very busy, with raising a growing family, a working career, and a variety of charities. She also was very active in local theater, and in 1978 earned a role on the television mini series “Awakening Land” starring Elizabeth Montgomery. That launched Sandy’s theatrical career, primarily in stage productions in Chicago and Milwaukee.

In 1978 she began working for the Rail Charity Golf Classic as a secretary. In 1980, when the tournament board of directors was looking for a new Executive Director, Sandy applied for the position, and was immediately selected. For the next twenty-seven years, her life revolved around the tournament, first known as the Rail Classic, and after 1993 as the State Farm Classic when the Bloomington Illinois-based insurance company became the tournament’s title sponsor. Over the years, the tournament donated hundreds of thousands to local charities, even while the purse prize rose steadily, attracting most of the sport’s leading figures. Among the LPGA’s elite golfers who have played in Springfield are Nancy Lopez, Jo Anne Carner, Betsy King; Beth Daniel, Pearl Sinn and Annika Sorenstam. The tournament draws talent from around the world, and has been televised since 1993. Wheeler finally stepped down from the position in 2005, a year that marked the tournament’s 30th year. Following that, the tournament experienced significant changes, including a change of venue from the Rail to Panther Creek Golf Course in Chatham, Illinois, and date changes away from its traditional Labor Day weekend to dates earlier in the year. At the time of the interview, the future of the tournament was in doubt, due largely to the economic recession in the United States. The tournament was cancelled in December, 2011 when State Farm Insurance was no longer able to sponsor the event.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Lincoln, Illinois; IL Inst. for Continuing Legal Education; LPGA; Rail Charity Golf Tournament; Leonard Sapp; Jacob ‘Jake’ Bunn; Nancy Lopez; JoAnne Carner; Betsy King; Bob Hope; Beth Daniel; Pat Bradley; State Farm Insurance; LPGA State Farm Classic; Bruce Callis of State Farm Insurance; Rail Golf Course; Jim Johnson of the Rail Golf Course; Pearl Sinn; *South Pacific*; *Bells are Ringing*; *Sound of Music*; *Mame*; *Applause*; *The Awakening Land* (TV Mini Series) Hal Holbrooke, Elizabeth Montgomery; Oleg Cassini; Marge Champion; Boris Sagal; Mi Hyun Kim; Annika Sorenstam; Michelle Wie

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