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Daniel J. Wellehan Jr. '55:

A life well spent in Maine

BY MARIA HEALEY



It's a lovely day down on the beach."

So says Daniel J. Wellehan Jr. '55, who is a lifelong resident of Maine—his summer cottage at the northern end of Old Orchard Beach in the town of Scarborough, has been in the family for years. He thinks the description of a typical day at Old Orchard Beach will “sound very wasteful,” but in fact it sounds delightful.

“Get up. Put on your bathing suit. Have breakfast. Go down and play on the beach.”

Wellehan loves to sail—he is an ocean racer—and has done it for much of his life. Summers in Maine are among the things that drew him back to his home state after his years at Holy Cross and in the Navy. Nowadays, he has “become fond of getting south of Key West” and leaves Maine for part of the winter—but, Wellehan mostly lives in Yarmouth, close to where he was born and raised. He settled his own family there and raised six children.

His roots in Maine go all the way back to his parents meeting for the first time in Old Orchard Beach. Wellehan's father, Dan Sr., grew up in Lewiston and worked first as a shoemaker, beginning as a teenager, and then as a retailer. In 1914, he and Charley Lamey (who would later marry Dan Sr.'s sister) founded the Lamey-Wellehan stores—which became Maine's Family Shoe Store and recently celebrated its 90th anniversary in 2004.

In 1946, Dan Sr. co-founded Sebago, Inc., specializing in recreational footwear. Sebago went on to become an industry leader and successful global brand with distinct ties to Maine.

Through the years the Sebago brand bore the stamp of Maine's tanneries, shoe factories and outdoor heritage.

Talking about his home state, Dan Jr. cites his family, the landscape, the distinct seasons and the recreation, not only as he felt them growing up, but as he remembered them while he was away from Maine, at college, and while in the Navy, touring all over the world.

Now, Dan Jr. is linking his affinity for Maine with Holy Cross. At the time of his 50th reunion last spring, he established the Daniel J. Wellehan Jr. Family Scholarship Fund with a \$100,000 gift. Preference in awarding the scholarship will be made for students who live in Maine.

Dan Jr. wanted to earmark the funds for something with particular meaning to him.

“The option I found most appealing was that of a scholarship for a deserving Maine student,” he says. “That identified with all of my past.”

Dan Wellehan Sr. met his wife, Kathleen McGuinn, in 1931. Having grown up in Worcester, she was a piano teacher and an organist at a number of churches. In the summertime, she went up to Old Orchard Beach to play in a trio of Worcester girls at the Vesper Hotel. Dan Sr. was vacationing in Old Orchard and met her there. The couple married and settled down in Lewiston, where they had Dan and, several years later, his brother, Jim '60.

The shoe business soared in the first part of the 20th century. The Lamey-Wellehan Stores expanded steadily during the 30s and 40s, with

new stores opening in Portland, Rumford, Augusta and Lawrence, Mass. After World War II, “in an era when penny loafers and saddle shoe oxfords were the standard uniform for all high school and college kids,” Dan Sr. (the sole owner of Lamey-Wellehan after the death of Charley Lamey) teamed up with two other shoemakers to meet the demand and founded Sebago.

“As a youngster, during school vacations, I’d work in the warehouse,” says Dan Jr. “I can’t say I liked it, but I didn’t dislike it. It was very welcoming—an old-fashioned kind of industry. The processes and techniques went back to the time just prior to the Civil War. It was very labor intensive, and each person had to perform a certain task upon the product. I just related very well to it.”

A graduate of Saint Dominic’s High School in Lewiston, Dan Jr. notes that the “key piece” to his attending Holy Cross was the fact that his mother’s family came from Worcester. Dan Jr. had an uncle, Jim McGuinn, who was a graduate of the Class of 1915 at the College—and two other uncles were members of the Society of Jesus. His high school football coach had also gone to Holy Cross.

“Early on, the twig was bent in that direction,” he says. “I remember the excitement when I was a youngster of some of the basketball teams back in the early days, listening to Holy Cross on the radio in the great NCAA victories. The College was very high on the list.”

Leaving a sequestered Maine for the city of Worcester, Wellehan learned something more about his home state: how far away it was from everything else.

“This was an era when turnpikes were not a part of the picture,” says Dan Jr. “It was a considerable distance to get from Maine to other parts of the world. When I got down (to Worcester), it was certainly like coming into a different civilization.”

Many of his classmates had graduated from Regis and Xavier and Boston College High School, big city schools.

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DAN WELLEHAN
ON SHOE MANUFACTURING

He remembers his first year as one “very intense struggle” to catch up—particularly in the classic languages—but also in the ways of the world outside of Maine.

Dan Jr. graduated with honors from Holy Cross with a bachelor of arts degree in economics and a concentration in Latin and Greek—courses that were mandatory for a bachelor of arts degree when he was a student.

“That was a great strength of the curriculum,” he says. “It was maybe an unbalanced approach, but the amount of time we spent in philosophy developed a sense of being able to logically approach certain things. That was of great value.”

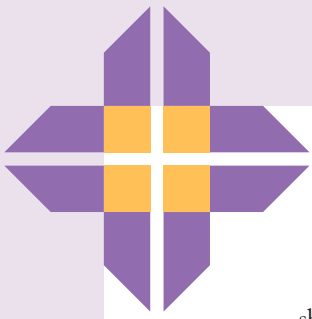
Holy Cross’ influence stayed with Dan Jr. After graduation, he did his military service in the Navy on a destroyer out of Norfolk, Va., that took him to places like the Persian Gulf, Bazra, Saudi Arabia and Greece.

“Visiting these places reacquainted me with all the things I’d been exposed to at Holy Cross,” he says—“All the windows to the world that were opened to us there, particularly the ancient worlds.”

After the Navy, Dan Jr. found himself with experience of the bigger world, a fading interest in the cities, and a renewed sense of what he loved about Maine.

“When all was said and done, Maine had the year-round four seasons,” he says. “Recreationally it was just great. You could easily move from one place to the other. You had wonderful summers sailing and the winter was spent skiing. Maine had a lot of appeal.”

In 1948, Sebago developed the world’s first leather boat



shoe. By 1952, a second factory opened to keep up with the demand for 2,000 pairs a day—and, in 1954, Sebago produced its millionth pair of shoes. By 1960, shoemaking was the largest employer in Maine. With the company's identity reflecting Maine's reputation for outdoor adventure, Sebago was initially famous for "the most comfortable shoes for the world's sailors"—it then evolved into producing quality indoor/outdoor footwear that combined the comfort of a leather loafer with the solidness of a recreational shoe.

By the time Dan Jr. returned to Maine, his father's shoe factory was part of a big boon to the state, succeeding with hands-on manufacturing, classic styling and a product line whose identity was linked to the "salt water, sea air and Maine's rugged coastline."

"Back then, shoes were a Maine business," says Wellehan. "It was a big part of the culture, shoe factories and tanneries. There was something very unique about leather. It was a substantial transformation—taking the raw material and converting it into a useful, aesthetic product. I wasn't a particularly scientific guy, but it was understandable. You could see the result of your work."

Known for quality hand-sewn leather and classic styling, the company's biggest shoe was the Docksides© boat shoe, which Sebago launched globally in 1970. Docksides became popular well beyond beaches and the decks of sailboats, hitting it big as a casual, fashionable shoe.

"They were great products," says Wellehan, "well-made and commercially acceptable."

Dan served as president and chief executive officer of Sebago and his brother, Jim, still serves as chief executive officer of Lamey-Wellehan.

"The company grew at a steady pace over many, many years," says Wellehan. "People were good to

Sebago WAS INITIALLY FAMOUS FOR
"THE MOST *comfortable* SHOES
FOR THE WORLD'S *sailors*"

us—the folks who worked for us, those who sold the product, and the suppliers. We had some excellent relationships all the way through."

In 2003, the decision to sell Sebago to Wolverine World Wide was a well-thought out choice with mixed emotions, considering what the business meant to the Wellehan family, and the overall dramatic change in American manufacturing that saw the closing of many independent businesses. But Dan Jr. believes Wolverine is a good company.

Noting that he continues to put his "recreation and avocation to good use," Dan refers to his involvement with the Multiple Sclerosis Regatta Harborfest—a Maine benefit sailing event that Dan and his friend and organizer, Merle Hallett, launched back in 1980. This effort, which is still going strong today, has evolved into a three-day affair that raises \$200,000 annually.

His gift of a scholarship to Holy Cross comes from a similar blend of generosity and service, enabling him to contribute something of his beloved Maine to an enduring cause that will continue to benefit others.

"Holy Cross opened so many doors," says Wellehan. "It had a lot of influence in various stages of my life. You just want to make some of that available."

MARIA HEALEY is a freelance writer from Northampton, Mass.

■ THE CLASS OF 1955 HONORS A BROTHER: JOSEPH J. REILLY JR.



left to right: Bob McKay, Fr. McFarland, Joe Reilly, Bob Danahy and Bill McCall

BY MARGARET DEVINE '99

At the Class of 1955's 50th reunion, Joseph J. Reilly Jr. presided over Friday's class dinner—one of his duties as class president since 1954. Reilly had just finished presenting awards and mementos when reunion Gift Chair Robert J. "Bob" McKay requested the microphone and said, "I think I know something Joe Reilly doesn't know."

The observation caught Reilly by surprise, which was followed by shock—when McKay announced that the Class had established a \$250,000 scholarship fund in recognition of all that Reilly has done for his class and the College for half a century.

In a secret letter to his classmates—who warmly refer to each other as brothers—McKay had writ-

ten, "Through his phone calls, his presence at weddings and funerals, his response to the personal and family crises of his brothers, his marshalling of financial aid to some of us in need and many other expressions of his care for us, he has truly served as the heart and soul of our Class—as well as its head for the past 50 years."

The letter, along with personal phone calls and visits by members of the gift committee, spurred several classmates to increase their donations and inspired others to contribute after a period of nonparticipation. The scholarship has been named the *Class of 1955 Scholarship in Honor of Joseph J. Reilly Jr.* For his part, Reilly says he thinks of his class as his "other family."

He also believes that his father, Joseph Sr., who was president of the Class of 1904 at Holy Cross, would be very pleased about the creation of the scholarship: Noting that his father earned his master's degree from Columbia in 1906 and his Ph.D. from Yale in 1913—and later taught at Hunter College for 28 years—Reilly points out that Joseph Sr. established two scholarships at the College and left his personal library of 8,000 books to Holy Cross.

"I think my dad would be thrilled as an educator to know about this new scholarship," Reilly says.

Six of Reilly's seven children are also graduates of Holy Cross.