

William J. Dinneen Medallion Service Award

by Julianne Couch
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The name William J. Dinneen (B.S., '49, Business Administration) is well known around UW, in the community of Cheyenne and around the state. Some people know him because of his involvement with Cowboy Joe and other campus organizations. Some know him because of his family transportation businesses, which have operated in Cheyenne in one form or another since the early 1900s. Still others know of Bill Dinneen because of his unflinching service to Cheyenne and the state of Wyoming.

Sloan Hales, M.D. of Cheyenne has known Dinneen for many years and describes him this way: "Here's an individual who has been true to his heritage as a fourth-generation Wyomingite, and presently is the patriarch to an additional two generations. He and his wife are a model family unit, working side-by-side, and reflecting fifty-two years of a very successful marital union. He has found fulfillment in his work, and he is today surrounded by innumerable friends, who would feel comfortable in confiding in him. Fortunate for Bill in his formative years, he was provided the opportunity to attend the University of Wyoming where he graduated with honors. He's been a personification of a marvelous heritage, fortified with a great education, and sustained by a faithful wife and honorable children. He's indeed a monumental credit to the humble, kind man we know today, as a special friend, businessman, and public servant."

According to Cynthia Lummis, State Treasurer and friend of the Dinneen family, "Bill Dinneen has been 'all work' while at work. He built a very successful Wyoming business and provided jobs to many Cheyenne residents. But when away from work, he is all family and all community, and is a delight to be with. I spent many happy occasions with the Dinneen family, especially during my high school and University of Wyoming years. Bill Dinneen treated all guests like extended family, and his very large extended family like members of the Dinneen household. A Christmas night party at the Dinneen's could go into the early morning hours as long as those in attendance continued to entertain each other."

Dinneen doesn't try to analyze his



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success in life or his motivation for contributing to his community. "The job was there so I tried to do it. I wasn't thinking about being motivated. It just seemed the thing to do."

For example, he and his wife Marietta Trowbridge Dinneen (Home Economics, '51) also recently served as honorary chairs at a fundraising gala for the United Medical Center foundation in Cheyenne. They were selected because of their commitment to healthcare in Cheyenne, according to the foundation. "I was supposed to be a figurehead, but it still turned out to be a lot of work," he admits. But he was happy to do it, since more than 900 people attend the dinner, which he describes as a "smashing success."

According to Dinneen, he and his wife are not the only people taking time to help with their favorite causes. "Cheyenne is a volunteer town," Dinneen explains. Because of the massive person power and detailed planning that goes into organizing Frontier Days, Dinneen believes a volunteer culture exists in Cheyenne, more so than in other places. "Every body has a job to do in the town, and everybody wants to help out."

Before becoming an established businessman, Dinneen first attended UW, right out of military service. He'd served in the Army's 103rd Division, which landed at Versailles in 1944. He received the Combat Infantry Badge and a Purple Heart. Then with the war in Europe winding down, many troops were rerouted to Japan. Although his group had only been in Europe about eight months, they were fortunate to be allowed to go home instead of being sent into the Pacific theater.

"We got home and had nothing to do since we weren't going to Japan, so

we all got discharged. The general at the office in Denver said he hoped we'd all go on to school, so that's what I did."

At that time colleges were full of women students because most of the young men were involved in the war. Dinneen explains that the women at UW were happy to see him. "They liked to have some men to talk to so it was a nice opportunity for me."

Although Dinneen had started out studying engineering it turned out to not be what he enjoyed. His father William J. Dinneen Sr. wanted him to study business and accounting, so that was the choice he soon made. His days at UW were as active as his later career would turn out to be. He became a member of Kappa Sigma fraternity, serving as president of the house and of the Interfraternity Council at UW. He was also a member of Student Senate. To earn a living, he worked serving meals to sorority women at the Delta Delta Delta house, where he was to meet his future wife.

"It was all very formal, serving on one side and picking up from the other. I don't think they do things like that anymore."

All his college activities taught him some valuable lessons that he took with him to the business world. He learned about the "organization of doing things" especially involving lots of groups or people with different interests. "Some of us were for the status quo, and others were for change. It was an influence on me, seeing how important it was to work together."

Dinneen went on to make a success of his career. He started out by joining his father in the automobile business in 1949, when they owned and operated the Cheyenne Motor Bus Company, and sold and represented the Plymouth line of cars. In the mid-1950s, they sold the bus company and changed from DeSoto-Plymouth to the Ford Motor Company, taking on the Lincoln-Mercury-Edsel franchise. They added Subaru cars and service in 1979, Pontiac, Buick cars and service in 1989, and Mazda cars and service in 1996. Throughout this entire period Dinneen also owned and operated the Hertz car rental franchise in Cheyenne.

In 1995 and 1996, the North American Customer Excellence Award was presented to the Lincoln-Mercury dealership in recognition of its outstanding customer satisfaction through progressive management, dedicated employees and high standards of operational excellence. For his outstanding performance as an automobile dealer and a valued citizen of his community, Dinneen in 1995 received the Quality Dealer Award for Business Achievement and Community Service, sponsored by Time Magazine in association with Goodyear Tire & Rubber

Company, in cooperation with the National Automobile Dealer's Association.

Dinneen says he never regretted leaving Cheyenne and trying his hand at business in a bigger city. "I'm happy we stayed in Wyoming. The auto business is a rough and tumble business. It is a different thing in metropolitan areas. You don't have an opportunity there to run a nice business and deal with people. In a small town you can be competitive but not flamboyant with advertising, and have long time employees. It makes a difference. I would rather have tried to run a nice business and be honest."

Dinneen has been careful to preserve the appearance of Cheyenne even as his car dealership business grew. His dealership still stands in the spot it was built by his grandfather William E. Dinneen in 1907, and although the company has acquired adjacent properties to allow the business to grow, they've maintained its historic appearance as much as possible. Today the building is on Cheyenne's Historic Buildings list.

His civic-minded attitude also shows in his varied volunteer service to the community. For example, he's been a member of the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, the Urban Renewal Board, the Downtown Association, Rotary and the Young Men's Literacy Society. He's been on the boards of Cheyenne National Bank, the First Wyoming Bank and Key Bank. He's been on the boards of United Way and many other organizations in Cheyenne. He's been especially active with Frontier Days, having served as Parade Chairman, planning committee member and the Board of Directors.

Most importantly, Dinneen has found time to contribute to UW causes, and has been a generous donor to the UW Foundation and to the Cowboy Joe Club. The business has supplied automobiles for use by UW football coaches as one of many ways to support the teams. He's also loaned his expertise by serving on the College of Business Advisory Council. He's retired from those volunteer activities now, he says, and instead hopes to spend a little time playing golf.

Dinneen's son Jim was instrumental in nominating his father for the Medallion Service Award, and he kept it a secret until the award was announced. Being acknowledged for a life of service to UW took the unassuming Dinneen by surprise. "I don't think that I did great things. I tried to be helpful and tried to be progressive in keeping things going if they were good for the town. I think we did make a difference with hospitals and different things. We tried to do them on a business basis and make some progress."

