

Joseph Drew UW Distinguished Alumnus

By Julianne Couch
Alumnews Editor

Fast Facts:

EDUCATION: BS '63

Business Administration

OCCUPATION: Owner and president
of the Drew Auto Center

SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Time Magazine Dealer of the Year in
1988; Joseph C. and Katherine A. Drew
Scholarship in the College of Business;
College of Business Distinguished
Alumni, 1997; Life member of the
UWAA.

Joe Drew said he might have been a success even if he hadn't attended UW. But there, he honed the skills and work ethic to rise to president of Drew Auto Center, a top selling, award winning Ford-Volkswagen-Hyundai dealership in La Mesa, Calif.

Drew grew up in La Mesa, where he lives today, but attended UW in part because he was a fan of the Old West, and also enjoyed the outdoor lifestyle. "When I was there a lot of students said, 'You're from California, what are you doing here?'" Drew thought students at UW didn't fully appreciate what they had. The best answer he could give was: "If you need to ask, there isn't a way to give you the answer."

Drew joined Alpha Tau Omega fraternity, where he met future Wyoming governor, Mike Sullivan. "Joe was the quintessential California beach boy when he arrived at UW," Sullivan recalled, "but rapidly adjusted to Wyoming, as is evidenced by his continuing love for the university, the state, and its wildlife resources. Consistent throughout Joe's life has been his creativity and enthusiasm, his work ethic and integrity and his natural salesmanship. All of these traits have obviously contributed to his lifetime success in business and community."

Drew Auto Center is the oldest family-owned dealership in San Diego County. Its services include new and used cars; automobile repair and service; automobile renting and leasing;

parts and supplies and automobile body repair and painting. Joe Drew's father, Elmer, started Drew's Garage in 1927, and after the local Ford dealership in town folded during the Depression, Elmer was awarded a Ford franchise in 1934. "I grew up in business because our house was behind the shop for awhile, which was very typical at that time."

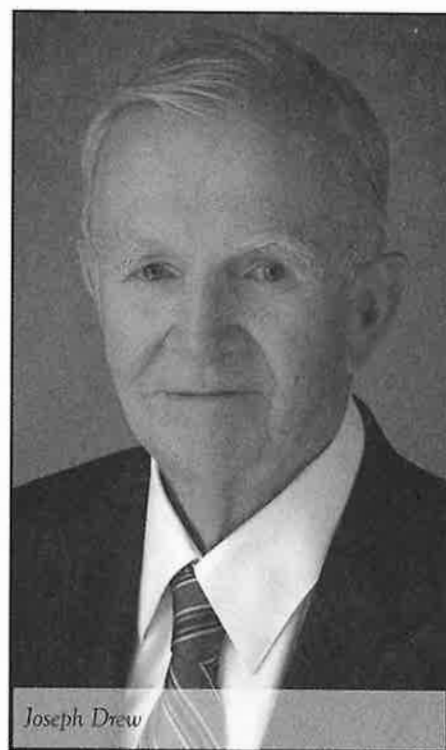
After Drew graduated from UW he entered the Army. In 1965, upon his discharge, Drew and his wife Kay (Klingaman) Drew ('62) drove to California and he started working at the dealership the next day. He said he chose to stay in the family business because he recognized his strengths. "What was easy for me was selling and making a business work. So that's the field that I chose."

Drew said he got an early taste of entrepreneurship when he discovered he could cross the California border into Tijuana and bring back from Mexico items UW students would eagerly buy from him. These included bongo drums, which Greek organizations would purchase for dances and other social gatherings. "There were no regulations in those days," Drew recounted about his "import" venture. "That's when I learned to buy low and sell high."

In another episode, Drew and a fraternity brother obtained motorcycles to see how far south they could drive them. They ended up taking a semester off for their 44-day odyssey to the Panama Canal. Instead of driving that route back, they made a deal with an airline in Panama to fly them and their motorcycles back for \$100. In exchange, the airline made a sales promotion out of it. They flew as far as Miami and rode the motorcycles home from there.

While the education he received and friendships he made at UW are irreplaceable, Drew said the best gift he received from UW was meeting his future wife. He and Kay try to get back to Laramie once a year to take part in College of Business activities. On occasion he addresses student groups. He believes they should "find what they are good at and be happy with. Life can be a great adventure but it is important that you be happy, enjoy your work, and allow the creative side to open up."

The most personally important thing the Drews do during their campus visits is to spend a few minutes at the spot in front of the A&S building



Joseph Drew

where they met. It happened just a few weeks into their first semester as freshmen. "She was sitting there when I walked by, and I thought she was the most beautiful woman I'd seen. I said, 'I'm from California and I'm lonely. Would you like to go out with me?' I couldn't believe she said yes."

Former College of Business Dean Brent Hathaway compares Joe and Kay Drew to other Californians of his acquaintance: "They are the finest people I know in the state of California—and having lived there four years, my network is significant. Joe is well-respected in both California and Wyoming for many reasons. First, he is the successful owner of one of the largest auto dealerships on the west coast. Second, Joe and his family are known for being fair, honest, and reliable in dealings with their customers, employees, and community."

"For me it was never about money," Drew said. "Money is the result of the way the Lord has blessed us and has a lot to do with Kay and me working together as a team. Success has been the result of this teamwork but it is not the central thing. The first thing is to be of service to others. If there is any relationship that's going to stand, it has to be bilateral or trilateral, not unilateral where you gain all the benefits and the

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others don't also gain from it. The main reason we exist is to serve customers, then to provide good solid employment, and as a result, the company benefits."

Drew admits this approach is "somewhat backward to what the world thinks about good business practices."

Drew said that if his UW professors

were still alive they could attest to the fact that he was not a great student. "I had the feeling that I could have come out of high school and gone to work in the shop and done fine, but there were so many things at the university that I was exposed to." Possibly because his academic career was less than stellar,

Drew says the idea he was "surprised" by being named a UW Distinguished Alumnus is an understatement. "It is a humbling experience. When I think of all of the people who've graduated from UW I can hardly imagine being nominated. It makes me blush to think about it." ❧