

2012 Hall of Fame Award



Bob Dabrowski



Bob Hepp



Bob Malerba

In recognition of their outstanding
Leadership & Contributions
to the Tire & Service Industry in New England

Congratulations!

*to this year's inductees for your years of dedicated service & commitment
to our industry from your Friends at*

SULLIVAN  TIRE

2012 Hall of Fame Inductee - Bob Malerba

Robert J. "Bob" Malerba was a man destined to be in the tire industry. Born in Meriden, CT on November 14, 1946, he was the son of G. William "Bill" Malerba and Helen Malerba. In 1939, Bill founded Meriden Parcel Gift Delivery. From the delivery business, came a service depot for the delivery trucks and from the service depot came a gasoline station. Soon, the Malerba brothers were servicing not only their own growing fleet of delivery vehicles, but also those of local car and truck owners in Meriden and surrounding communities. From there it was only a logical progression to add a tire recapping and repair facility to supply their own and their customer's needs. Through all of this expansion, the principle of "PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT" came first.

Bob, as many of us have done, grew up around the family business learning two jobs; first, the operational aspects from the bottom up and second the management of the team. This all was greatly influenced by "PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT".

Bill saw that Bob was struggling to find himself during his high school years and knew that he needed a more structured environment to mature in. Therefore, Bob attended St. Thomas More School, a residential prep academy in Montville, CT. While there, he served as a dormitory prefect, basketball statistician, school driver (a VW microbus!) prom chairman, was his class President and played varsity soccer and golf. Bob graduated third in the class of 1966 and was the first St. Thomas More graduate to be accepted to Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. All the while, he worked in the family business as a service technician and retreader.

By June of 1970, Bob graduated with a BS in economics, minoring in religion and philosophy. There, he met the love of his life, Marianne, known to all of us as Kitty. During his time at Catholic University, Bob was the senior manager and statistician for the basketball team, played varsity club football, achieving honorable mention All-American status and a member of Phi Kappa Theta. And again, all the while, he worked in the family business as a service technician and retreader.

Upon graduation, Bob attended U. S. Air Force officer training and then went on to pilot school. This led to three tours of duty in Vietnam, starting as a 2nd Lieutenant (Co-pilot) and progressing to aircraft commander, instructor pilot. He logged over 3,000 hours of flight time. During his Air Force

career, Bob and Kitty were gifted with a daughter Kym and son Jeff. In 1979, Bob declined a position as instructor's instructor along with a promotion to Major to return to the family business no doubt greatly influenced by "PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT", especially family!

During 1981, Bob was selected to fill a seat on the board of the Connecticut Tire Dealers and Retreaders Association vacated by a retiring member. Subsequently in 1982, Bob was elected President and also represented CTDRA on the board of the NTDR. Thus began his career serving tire dealers throughout the United States.

In May of 1984, Bob purchased the stock of Malerba's Silver City Tire Co., Inc. from his father. The company flourished under Bob's leadership; in 1994, Tyre Man of Manchester, Ct was purchased, adding a second location for the first time since 1939. Growing again in 1998, the commercial division of Sam Wibberly Tire in Dayville, CT was purchased and relocated to a brand new facility custom built to specifications resulting from Bob's research and tire service and sales experience.

While he was successfully piloting the family business, Bob was selected by then president of the Tire Association of North America Pam Gatto to help initiate discussions concerning the merger of TANA with the ITRA. In May of 1999, Bob was elected secretary of TANA, setting a course culminating in the presidency of TIA (formed by the merger Bob helped conceive), in November of 2005. He also served as the chair of TIA's training and education committee, having

Malerba's Silver City Tire service technicians among the first in the country to be certified in commercial service and also automotive service.

By May, 2004 it became clear to all that Bob's future as a national leader in the tire industry and his involvement as a certified tournament observer with the International Game Fish Association were occupying all of his time and energy. At this juncture, Bob elected to sell the assets of Malerba's to Bob Berlin in order to better manage his duties to the tire industry and most important to Bob, his grandchildren, twins Abigail and Joseph, born in 2004. He was adamant that none of his employees lost jobs or tenure due to the sale. "PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT"!

Bob's service to the community throughout his life knew no bounds. Just a few follow:

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2012 Hall of Fame Inductee - Bob Hepp

Robert (Bob) Hepp always seemed predestined to own his own business - some say that's because he probably could not work for anyone else, or maybe it was a result of years of sharing with four siblings growing up in Plainville CT (his two brothers also became business owners). It all started at age 12 when Bob bought a newspaper route and then started to expand it by buying up two adjoining routes.

After graduating high school, Bob was told he was probably not "college material" even though he had good board scores (something about being late for school so often). Accepting the fact that college wasn't in the cards, Bob got a job managing Gas Land gas stations and training franchisees. Here is where fate intervened: that fall a brand new community college happened to open across the street from his current job location, so he joined the inaugural class. An economics professor took an interest in Bob and got him excited about business. Bob graduated with honors and went on to get his B.S. in Business Administration from the University of Connecticut (Go Huskies). UCONN is also where he met his future wife Sandra who has been his partner in life for the last 36 years.

Bob started his next business, building swimming pools, the summer after graduating college. But with the fall coming and having proposed to Sandy (who was starting her teaching career), Bob figured it was time he found a "real job". He took a position with Firestone as a retail sales manager (in training) at their company store in Hartford, CT. Here fate interceded again because this was one of Firestone's largest stores that handled commercial, off the highway, farm (shade grown tobacco) and wholesale sales as well as retail and auto service. For the next four years Bob worked in every aspect of the business and was lucky to learn from some of the best people in the industry. In 1979 after attending store manager training in Akron,

OH (yes, they still made tires there), Bob was assigned as the store manager for the Firestone wholesale store in Manchester, NH, which was losing a lot of money at the time. Over the next three and a half years, Bob grew that store to be one of the largest and most profitable wholesale stores in the country. Bob still claims it would have been number one except for that store in Alaska during the building of the oil pipeline.

In 1983 fate popped up again when one of Bob's dealers in Burlington, VT offered him the chance of a lifetime: to manage a new wholesale tire business as a partner. Knowing it was a risk he had to take (and grateful for Sandy's support), Bob took all their savings and set up shop in a construction trailer for an office and an old



cow barn for a warehouse – which became University Wholesalers. In the first year, total sales were around \$400,000 and the business just about broke even. But Bob had seen something that first cold winter in Vermont. With a growing population of imported cars that needed winter tires and domestic manufacturers not yet building the sizes needed, he saw an opportunity to fill a niche if

only he could find a supplier willing to sell to him. Just in time, fate returned. Seeing an ad in a tire magazine for a company out of Finland, Bob got a bank letter of credit and placed an order for almost 2,000 winter tires from a broker handling Nokia (later named Nokian) tires. When this supplier went bankrupt, Bob contacted Nokia directly and brokered a deal. The rest is history.

Over the next 25 years, Bob and some new partners (co-workers) bought out the original partners (as planned), and grew University Wholesalers business to almost \$40 million in sales, built a 200,000 sq. foot warehouse in Vermont, and added a location near Albany, NY. The last act of fate is when another tire wholesaler from outside New England approached Bob to see if he might be

2012 Hall of Fame Inductee - Bob Dabrowski



Robert A. Dabrowski.
Born 1938; Married to
Marlene Dabrowski
4 children 2 grand
children
Lives in Marlborough, NH
Graduated from Pinker-
ton Academy, Derry , NH
1956
Served in the US Air Force
for 4 years. Graduated
from Electronics Trade

School; Graduated from Lee Institute of Real Estate,
passed the NH Real Estate Brokers license exam and
started Dabrowski Real Estate. When the Shoe factory in
Keene, NH closed in 1971, I lost my machinist job and

left me with buying/ selling and renting houses, a small
antique business, and buying and selling cars. That is when
I went into the tire business. 37 years and 46 stores later,
I retired.

Current Hobbies includes traveling with my wife and
kids, working with my church and Christian school, and
working in my machine and wood shop.

My kids make life a lot of fun. We compete in play-
ing pool, target shooting, Pinewood Derby Racing, stock
car racing, road racing, and most recently three family
members have bought Rock Crawlers- which has been a
blast. My favorite thing is having a cook out at the end of
the day.

I am a church going believer in Jesus Christ and my goal is
to spend more time with my family.

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Established the Alumni Fellows Program to mentor stu-
dents at St. Thomas More

Served on the NETSA board for over 10 years, receiving the
President's Award in 2005.

Board member and Corporator of the Meriden Boys' and
Girls' Club

Served as president of the Meriden Civitan Club

Served as vice president of the Meriden Unison Club

Was a corporator and advisor to Girl's, Inc. in Meriden

Was a long time member of the Meriden Elks Club

Three time vice president of the Northeast Saltwater Fish-
ing Club

Among the numerous awards and honors Bob has received
over the years are:

Inclusion in the Meriden Boys' and Girls' Club Hall of Fame

Uconn Connecticut Family Business Award Runner-up,
Small Business Division

Meriden Chamber of Commerce "Faith in Meriden" award
winner

St. Thomas More 2010 Founder's Award Recipient

Robert John Malerba, 64 years old, husband of Kitty (Mari-
anne) Malerba of 40 years, father of Kym and Jeff passed
away on May 30, 2011 following a courageous two year
battle with cancer.

Sadly, Bob is not with us for his induction into the NETSA Hall
of Fame, but he has many business associates and friends left
behind who benefitted from "PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT".

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interested in selling the business. When Nokian heard this,
they decided it would be better if they bought University
Wholesalers, and put together a fair offer. Bob and most
of his other partners have proven to be an exception and
have stayed on as employees long past what was required
in their contracts. Even after all these years, it's hard to
find another person who is as passionate about winter
tires (and their impact on driving safety) as Bob Hepp.

When he's not talking about tires, Bob can be
found spending time with his family. Both of his daughters
grew up working at University Wholesalers in the summers.
Erica is now an attorney in Boston and Megan is a regis-
tered dietician and trainer in Charlotte NC. Bob has retired
from his days of little league coaching, but he still enjoys
cheering for local sports teams and most recently watching
his daughter Megan participate in the Marathon Olympic
Trials.