

Johnston Family



The Johnston name came to Frankenmuth through T.W. "Bill" Johnston. Bill was born on a farm outside of Hillman, Michigan, on November 18, 1911. He lived in Battle Creek and graduated from Hillsdale College in 1933 with a business degree. Bill began work as a sales representative for General Foods. In 1944, he started working for Progressive Wholesale Company, an IGA supply depot in Bad Axe, Michigan. Bill became Sales Manager in 1946 and was instrumental in establishing the IGA Foodliner at 308 Main Street in Frankenmuth, in 1949. In 1950, Bill and his family moved to a home next to the store.

The Johnstons, of Scottish descent, found their way to America, where Bill's grandfather, Thomas Benjamin, was born in 1845. He served in The Union Army, later coming to Alpena, Michigan, where he was elected Sheriff until 1876. Thomas moved to Hillman, Michigan. In 1880, he married Lucy Jane Kilborn and had four children, of which Truman Benjamin Johnston (1855-1960) was Bill's father. He married Margaret Hunt and they had three children: Ralph Benjamin, Robert Wallace, & T. Willard (Bill).

T. Willard (Bill) married Marguerite Boomhower on September 25, 1937. They had three sons. Robert Thomas Johnston was born March 14, 1939 in Traverse City, Michigan. He worked at the Frankenmuth IGA at age 10 and continued throughout high school and college. Robert remained in the business after graduating from Michigan State University – the last 23 years working for Super Food Services in Vassar and Bridgeport. He married Elaine Roth and they had two children, Scott Robert and Anne Catherine. They divorced. Robert married Leila and she brought three daughters to their marriage: Kelly, Karen and Kathy. They have ten grandchildren. David R. Johnston was born April 14, 1942. He attended Valparaiso University. He and his wife Carol had two sons, Mark and Chris.

David was vice-president of T.W. Johnston & Sons, Ltd., the family-owned business. He served in various church and community activities, was a member of the Frankenmuth Convention and Visitor's Bureau, the Downtown Development Authority, the Frankenmuth 2000 Economic Development Committee, the Frankenmuth Rotary Club, and president of Michigan's Own Military and Space Museum.

Tom Willard Johnston Jr. was born March 28, 1947. He attended Michigan State University. Tom worked in the family business, too. He married Kathy Bernthal and they had two daughters, Julie and Rachel. They divorced. Tom married Mary Narnek. She brought a daughter Amy to the marriage. Tom was a member and officer in the Frankenmuth Jaycees, the Frankenmuth Rotary Club, and the City Council. He was a member of the Board of Directors of Oven Fresh Bakery.

The IGA Foodliner/Ben Franklin had remodeling projects, expansions, and innovative ideas that made it the largest IGA in Michigan. In 1987, Bill received the "Super Foods Michigan Retailer of the Year" award and was named to the national honor roll of Outstanding Independent Grocers.

Bill served as president of the Frankenmuth PTA, the Frankenmuth Rotary Club, the Saginaw Intermediate School District, and the Frankenmuth Development Company. He was chairman of the Frankenmuth Zoning Appeals Board, a member of the Frankenmuth School Board for 8 years, and a 14-year member of the Salvation Army Advisory Board. He was awarded the Salvation Army's community service award "Others", the Rotary's "Paul Harris Fellow" award, and the Herbert L. Keinath "Distinguished Service Award". Bill was the catalyst and first major contributor to Michigan's Own Military and Space Museum's Capital Fund Drive which led to the Museum's permanent home in Frankenmuth.



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