

Keller Family



he Keller name was brought to Frankenmuth in 1969 when Donald Duane Keller married Judith (Judy) Zehnder. Judy is the owner and president of the Bavarian Inn Lodge.

Donald was born in Benton Harbor, Michigan April 19, 1945, but his German ancestry can be traced to his grandfather. Rhinehold Keller came to Chicago in 1911 from the Hanover, Germany area. He married Amalie Friedrich and they moved to Bridgman, Michigan in 1924 to begin a fruit and vegetable farm.

Rhinehold lost everything but the farm truck when the Great Depression struck. He used the vehicle to develop a day-old bread route in rural Bridgman and Baroda. His sons, Arthur (Donald's father) and Edward, reversed the route in the 1930's. They picked up fruit and vegetables from area farmers and trucked the produce to the wholesale markets in Chicago.

Eventually, Arthur bought a fruit farm and married Erna Ruth Hartwig. They had two daughters, Joyce Singer and Lorraine Smith, and two sons, Glenn and Donald.

The boys worked on the farm, which included 20 acres of grapes and three acres of strawberries, plus pickles, tomatoes, squash and horseradish. The Keller's also had a nursery stock business supplying strawberry plants to several major nurseries in the Bridgman area.

When he was 14 years old, Donald worked part-time for his Uncle Ed Keller trucking produce to Chicago. The trip began at 10:00 p.m. and Donald arrived back home by 6:00 a.m., in time for school.

During his senior year in high school, Donald figured out a better way to earn money for college. He and a friend,

Bobby Schaller, formed a company that developed a line of portable tool attachments. They purchased a building near Olivet College when they were 18. It was not only their business headquarters – they lived there, too. Eventually they employed 35 college students.

Donald was in charge of marketing and sales. He sold their products to major hardware chains and also made a successful marketing trip to Europe and Scandinavia when he was 20 years old to establish seven major customers in six countries.

The two partners sold the business after they graduated from Olivet College in 1967. Donald earned a degree in economics.

Donald was drafted and served 14 months in intelligence with a combat engineer battalion in the central highlands of Dakto, South Vietnam.

When he returned to the States he married Judith Zehnder on November 8, 1969. Her family owns and operates the Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn Restaurant as well as the Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn Lodge. Donald joined the family businesses and served as director of sales and marketing for both.

Donald and Judy have three children – Michael, Martha and William.



Researched & Compiled by Bavarian Inn Lodge
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