

# STARKE COUNTY

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## Economic Development Foundation

**Contact:**

**Starke County Economic Development Foundation, Inc.**

1915 S. Heaton Street

Knox, IN 46534

Charles W. Weaver, Executive Director

(574) 772-5627

[execdir@scedf.biz](mailto:execdir@scedf.biz)

**EMBARGOED UNTIL FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2016**

**STARKE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION TO HONOR WILLIAM J. SONNEMAKER**

**WITH ITS ROBERT E. HAMILTON AWARD**



*William J. Sonnemaker*

The Starke County Economic Development Foundation will host its Fourth annual “Prospectus and Achievements Event” on October 13, 2016 at the Knox Middle School beginning at 11:10 am CDT. This event is open to the public. The event will culminate with the awarding of the Robert E. Hamilton

Award, named in honor of the now deceased banker widely believed to be the leading force for the creation of the Foundation. This Award was established by action of the Foundation's Board of Directors and first announced at the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of SCEDF. It is awarded to a person who has contributed a great amount of service in the field of economic development as well as the community as a whole.

When Mat Swanson wanted to add a new member to the Starke County Economic Development Foundation's Building & Sites Committee and the Board, he did not have to look very long or very hard before asking one of his neighbors at Bass Lake to get involved in the Foundation. And get involved he has done ever since and in a big way. This year's winner of the Robert E. Hamilton Award is William J. Sonnemaker, a resident of Bass Lake since 1997, having moved here from Sunnyvale, California after retirement from Lockheed Martin Missiles and Space Company. How he got to Bass Lake and Starke County and what he did before and after that move makes for a fascinating story.

Bill Sonnemaker was born in Peoria, Illinois in June of 1930, one of two sons born to Harry Sonnemaker Sr. and Grace (Reiferscheid) Sonnemaker. Bill's brother was Harry "Hank" Sonnemaker, Jr., a prominent attorney in Peoria for several years who died last year at the age of 88. Bill's father was born and raised on a farm and later moved to Peoria where he started in the insurance business and later became a real estate appraiser, finishing his career as a United States government appraiser on the interstate highway system. Bill's early education came at St. Barnabas, a local parochial school, and he completed his high school education at Spalding Institute, also in Peoria.

Bill attended Bradley University, in Peoria, Illinois. His college education was funded by the Air Force ROTC and he was commissioned as an Air Force Lieutenant in 1952. He was active in the Air Force Reserves at Bradley until receiving his BSIE degree in 1954, at which time he was called to active duty serving in the Air Force from 1954 through 1956. His last duty assignment was at the Ford Motor Company Aircraft Engine Division in Chicago, Illinois which actually led to one of his first jobs at the Ford Division in Chicago. Bill states that looking back that short period of time exposed him to people he otherwise would not have known, things he had never experienced, and processes and ways of doing things that he would later take with him as his career at Lockheed Martin evolved. Bill sees those early years at Ford as very helpful to him later in life, and for more reasons than one, an area that will be touched upon later.

With the ending of the Korean War, Ford's production capability was no longer needed by the Air Force. As the Chicago facility began to close, there was a major event that changed the world when Russia launched the first satellite called "Sputnik", and with it, the aerospace era began. Bill moved to Sunnyvale, California in the center of what is now known as Silicon Valley, beginning in the Lockheed Facility Operations Division in 1959, a division he headed from 1987 to his retirement in 1997. Lockheed Martin Facility Operations Organization at that time had over 1,200 people responsible for the design, layout, construction, and maintenance of over 12 million square feet of floor space. The main plant included over 200 buildings and roadways on a 600-acre site, plus a research site in Palo Alto, California. His duties included site selection and development in other states and the administrator of the company's capital asset budget. Not only did Bill and his department need to know about design,

construction, and maintenance, but they also had to know the minute details with respect to highly classified missile contracts, the plans and schedules of production groups, and knowledge of equipment requests. While at Lockheed, the company was heavily involved in submarine-launched fleet ballistic missiles and with NASA on its Hubble space telescope program, among many other projects. Despite Bill's heavy commitment at Lockheed, he found time to serve his community by serving as a director of the Sunnyvale Chamber of Commerce. He also had affiliations as a Registered Professional Engineer in California, American Institute of Industrial Engineers, Society of Automotive Engineers, National Management Association, Industrial Development Research Council (now Core Net), International Facility Management Association, and the California Society of Professional Engineers. If that were not enough, Bill also served as Secretary and Director of the Lockheed Federal Credit Union (one of the largest Federal Credit Unions in the United States at that time), and was also a Director of the Lockheed Management Association.

While at Lockheed, Bill was selected for the Stanford Sloan Executive Fellow Program, which he attended in 1968-1969. That program, an intensive, one-year educational program that would bring together future business leaders and future teachers of business had as its primary goal to fill a gap in business education. The program began in 1957 and it still offers high-performing managers a chance to reassess and broaden their focus at mid-career without the distractions of work — a chance that is available almost nowhere else. Companies sent their most promising managers to the program. One hallmark of the program has long been interaction with business leaders who come to campus, and other leaders who spend time with the fellows during annual field trips including New York and Washington. Bill recounts meeting David Rockefeller and sitting in a several hour meeting with him in his office, allowing fellows to ask questions and learn in that way. That was just one of several people that Bill had the opportunity to do that with during his time in the program, and he still fondly describes those experiences today as being very important to his life and work experiences, and indeed, even in retirement, Bill continues to use that experience in his everyday life and his work with organizations in this county. He also has continued his fondness for Stanford University, especially in their football fortunes.

Let us now return to Bill's early days at Ford. While there, he met Nancy M. Lorenz who worked in the Air Force Office at Ford, and actually served as Bill's secretary in that capacity, and they fell in love and married on October 25, 1958. Nancy's mother was born in the Starke County area and in 1919 her grandfather bought a place at Bass Lake for a summer residence, where Nancy spent time every summer for several years. Her family continues to reside at Bass Lake today. Bill's bother Harry bought a house at Bass Lake as well. Nancy and the growing family would spend weeks in the summer visiting family at Bass Lake. It was Harry and Nancy's father who told Bill and Nancy about the property that once housed the Centerview Hotel being for sale, although it was in disarray at the time. Bill and Nancy bought that property in 1973 with the idea of eventually retiring there. The original thought was to tear it down and start over, but using it for a few months in the summer led to one improvement after another, and today the old hotel still stands on its original site, but much improved for single-family occupancy.

Bill and Nancy are the parents to four (4) children, two of whom are part of the Lockheed family at the present time. Those children include William (Susan) of Aurora, Colorado, Kenneth (Tawnya) of

Indianapolis, Indiana, Julie (Steve “Rik”) Ritzler of Bass Lake, Indiana, and James (Melissa), currently stationed in Australia. They have 12 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren as well.

So what has this talented individual done since retiring? Lots. Locally, Bill has given his time and talents to Starke United where he served as a director and treasurer, as a director for 6 years on the Bass Lake Property Owner’s Association, and since 2003, as a member of the Board of both the Foundation and SCILL. During his tenure, Bill served 6 years as President, and as chair of several committees. During his presidency, he established a Workforce Development Committee which was primarily responsible for identifying new programs in welding and now automation, robotics, and equipment maintenance, both of which have been handed off to SCILL for implementation. His efforts on behalf of the Foundation are legend both in northwest Indiana and the state of Indiana, as he continues to take part and attend various regional and state conferences and meetings. Bill also agreed to join the Culver Community School Board back in 2013 and continues with that assignment to date, bringing his years of experience and common sense to that Board.

When asked to name a few accomplishments of the Foundation since his joining the Board, Bill said that establishing the workforce Development Committee was one, and that promoting the concept that the work of a Foundation Director was serving as a working director, and not just occupying space on the Board, through service on one or more committees of the Board. Finally, he acknowledged the tireless contributions of Diane Thalmann as a board member, and his successor as President of the Foundation while an employee of NIPSCO as being extremely helpful to the growth and stature of the Foundation, especially in his and her contributions working together to promote the concept of internal marketing as being so very important.

Bill Sonnemaker has played a very valuable role both at Lockheed and now in retirement with local and area organizations, using his lifetime of accomplishments and experiences to make Starke County a better place. For his role in the growth of the Foundation and his tireless efforts on behalf of the Foundation and SCILL, William J. Sonnemaker is this year’s recipient of the Robert E. Hamilton Award.

## **ABOUT SCEDF**

The Starke County Economic Development Foundation is a not-for-profit local economic development organization (LEDO) providing economic development opportunities on behalf of Starke County, Indiana, the City of Knox, and the Towns of North Judson and Hamlet through the development of industrial parks, rail spurs, greenfield sites, shovel-ready sites, infrastructure and workforce development. For more information regarding the Starke County Economic Development Foundation, visit [www.scedf.biz](http://www.scedf.biz).

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