

Histories of the 50 Senior Sage Leaders

Gary Quehl

The 50 senior sage leaders range in age from 56 to 90, with the average being 70 years. Unlike the emerging sages, two-thirds are men. In terms of generational characteristics, two-thirds are Traditionalists and one-third are Baby Boomers.

Slightly less than half were born out-of-state (Washington State, Oklahoma, Kansas, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Florida, England) and somewhat more than half were born in various California communities (Berkeley, San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Whittier, Chico, Inglewood, San Bernardino, Willows). One-half currently live in Nevada City, a quarter of them reside in Grass Valley, and the rest live elsewhere in Nevada County (Lake Wildwood, Rough & Ready, Alta Sierra, Lake of the Pines, Penn Valley, Cascade Shores, San Juan Ridge).

Senior sage leaders grew-up in both blue collar and professional family backgrounds. A number were raised on small family farms, and some had fathers who were miners, small business owners, electricians, construction workers, and policemen. Among the professions were attorney, FBI agent, physician, teacher, school administrator, minister, government official, WWII submarine commander, magazine publisher, senior businessman, architect, and corporate officer. Most were raised in homes with traditional values, where respectful behavior and hard work were family norms. One grew-up in England and as a young girl looked after her mother and younger sibling in air raid shelters during the Battle of Britain. About half were raised in homes where community service was part of the family ethos, and the other half were raised in families where little or no community service was experienced or expected:

There is a lot of past family involvement in the community. On my husband's side was a Nevada City founding father. On the side of my husband's mother was a homesteader in Indian Flat and a member of many community organizations. The men and women of the

family have always been involved in the volunteer fire department, city government, and service organizations.

My father was President of the San Bernardino Chamber of Commerce and was involved in a number of other civic organizations as well. My mother did volunteer work for as long as I can remember, and still does at 89 years of age. It was just part of growing up in our family. We had a philosophy that “those who are given much must return.”

I grew-up in a Jewish culture, and our family always placed a high value on helping others.

My dad’s mantra was, “You owe it to serve your community. It’s about love, and that’s what being Christian is all about.” He was chosen Green Bay Citizen of the Year in 1986, 22 years before his death at age 93.

We didn’t have a lot of money, and my father worked all the time so couldn’t volunteer. And my mother didn’t have the time either. We were just a hardworking family with six kids. The idea of community service just wasn’t there – we were probably looking more like the recipients of community service than anything.

Most senior sage leaders attended traditional public elementary and secondary schools, and almost all earned a bachelor or associate degree. A third went on to earn a master’s degree, and one-fifth earned a Ph. D., a law degree, or other advanced graduate degree. Two-thirds attended a wide range of California public and private colleges and universities, and one-third graduated from higher learning institutions in other states: Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Missouri, Massachusetts, Florida.

Almost all senior sage leaders lived in several communities during their childhood, and most moved often during their careers—one 19 times—and one to numerous Asian countries, and three in Europe. About one-fifth were in the US military, one serving as a fighter pilot during WWII, another in the post-Korean War navy, several in the army, and one in the US Marine

Corps. All experienced major personal or career challenges that greatly shaped them. Four were fired at some point, others worked for companies that failed or were acquired, and most experienced financial hardships during their work years. Many senior sages changed companies or professions—for example from minister to architect—and advanced their careers by taking risks, taking on new responsibilities, and being aggressive in pursuing new challenges. Each repeatedly made courageous career decisions, and many “moved on” when they were bored or saw their careers stagnating. Virtually all are, or have been, deeply involved as volunteers and leaders in community nonprofit organizations.

The 50 senior sage leaders represent a wide range of occupations and professions. Fifteen were or are employed in telecommunications and electronics; six in high level sales, music, or higher education administration; and about 29 represent banking, the ministry, the military, high school teaching and administration, retail and manufacturing, agri-business, county government, civil engineering, art, real estate, restaurant management, mortuary management, and homemaking. All held, or continue to hold, significant positions in their career including: US Marine Major General (retired), college president, national association president for private colleges and universities, Fortune 500 CEO and senior vice-presidents, vice-presidents of sales and marketing, business owners, city manager, and manager of marketing and public relations. Slightly less than one-third of senior sage leaders are still employed full-time. Less than one-fifth are semi-retired, and almost two-thirds are fully retired.