

## **This FHSU alum is changing the world one experience at a time**

Be Good. Make A Difference. Change the World. These eight words are the guiding principles of Fort Hays State University alumnus Peter J. Werth. Indeed, I have witnessed over and over again his kindness, the tremendous impact he has had on teaching and learning at FHSU, and how Peter has changed not only our world but the lives of so many.

Starting with a \$25 gift in 1981, and steadily expanding for more than 40 years, Peter has given generously to our women's basketball program, departments of applied technology and chemistry, the entrepreneurship program housed in the Robbins College of Business and Entrepreneurship, the Kansas Academy of Mathematics and Science, the Honors College, and the Werth College of Science, Technology and Mathematics.

Who is Peter J. Werth? If you read his biography, you will know that he has been a transformative visionary leader for more than fifty years. He is the founder, CEO, and president of ChemWerth Inc., Woodbridge, Conn., and a 1959 FHSU graduate with a bachelor of science in chemistry. He also earned a master's in organic chemistry from Stanford University. Peter began his career with Hewlett-Packard in 1961.

In 1964, he worked as a staff scientist at Spindletop Research before becoming the head chemist for Upjohn Pharmaceuticals (now Pfizer). In 1965, he became manager of Upjohn's R&D department. From 1975 to 1983, Peter served as vice president of sales and marketing for Ganes Chemicals. Peter founded ChemWerth in 1982 to develop active pharmaceutical ingredients to produce generic drugs. Today, Peter serves on several boards and is connected to several startup companies as an Angel investor.

Another scan of his biography reveals the many awards he has received, including the FHSU Alumni Achievement Award. He also has received honorary doctorate degrees from Southern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut. The good works of his family foundation, his many charitable contributions, and the impact of his work have made significant contributions to improving the quality of life for people all over the world.

However, the elements of his story that most resonate with me are his humble beginnings, strong work ethic, kindness, and the direct, personal impact he has had on so many individuals.

Peter grew up in Hays, Kansas. Born into modest beginnings, he was one of eight children. His parents owned The Mecca, a local restaurant at the corner of 27th and Vine, the current location of Walgreens. He learned the value of hard work early in life. Peter and his siblings all helped out at the restaurant, famous for its hamburgers. When not studying or working at the restaurant, Peter could also be found mowing the acres of grass in the cemetery across the street. Hard work was a lesson all the Werth children learned early and often. These lessons not only powered him through college but also helped fuel his success throughout his career.

Having had the honor of spending time with Peter and watching him interact with many people, I have been most inspired by how he selflessly develops and champions opportunities for our students that are extraordinarily impactful. We are deeply indebted to Peter for his generous financial support for our Tiger women's basketball program. But what differentiates Peter's impact is his focus on crafting peak experiences for our student-athletes – like flying our team to

Connecticut to meet legendary coach Geno Auriemma and practice and play an exhibition game against his UConn Huskies, one of the top women's basketball teams in NCAA Division I. Our student-athletes will remember that experience for the rest of their lives.

"This definitely was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the players," said FHSU's Kacey Kennett, who actually was making her second trip to UConn with Peter and the Tiger team – her first time back in 2017 as a player and this year as a graduate assistant coach.

"A lot of Division I teams don't even get to play UConn," Kacey added, "so this opportunity – and all the opportunities I have gotten by attending Fort Hays State – I will cherish forever."

I am also awed by how compassionately he connects with others and his ongoing commitment to helping break down barriers for our students. As a very recent example, Peter is planning to fund the education expenses of a young Nepal woman, Nyima Gyalmu Lama, and send her to FHSU to study nursing. If Nyima can get her Visa by January, she might be able to begin her dream of becoming a nurse as early as the spring 2022 semester!

Recently, a delegation of FHSU faculty and staff had the opportunity to travel to UConn to visit the Peter Werth Institute for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. There, we met sophomore Allie Davenport, who, like Peter, has dreams of making our world better.

Allie was a high school athlete who developed a medical condition known as paradoxical vocal fold motion, a breathing disorder where the vocal cords function abnormally, restricting airflow during respiration. Allie learned that one of the underlying causes of this condition is anxiety.

"My mind was powerful enough to trigger my vocal cords to malfunction and restrict airflow," she explained.

Allie underwent months of speech therapy to help her retrain her body how to breathe and her mind how to resist a panic mode and to relax. Her journey fueled her passion for mental wellness and for helping to make a difference for others on their personal wellness journey.

With the support of the Peter Werth Institute for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Allie set out to make a difference in the lives of others through the creation of StarMind – an interactive journal that combines daily self-reflection logs, thought-provoking activities, and a series of QR codes that leads the journalist to digital resources and tools on specific psychology-related concepts.

Allie did not just receive funding for an idea. Focusing on experiences, Peter provided her with an audience of FHSU faculty to hear her story and her pitch. We marveled at her passion and dedication. We expressed our enthusiastic support and encouragement. Several purchased journals on the spot while Peter purchased a book for the entire Tiger team and their parents who were present that day.

Like our basketball players and our Nepali nursing student, I bet Allie will remember that day and the connections she made with FHSU Tigers for a very long time. I will maintain an email relationship with Allie myself – encouraging her heart to continue to inspire the hearts and minds of others.

Some may know Peter Werth as a "rags to riches" story, others as an astute and accomplished businessman. I will always see him as someone who has lived his mantra: Be Good. Make A Difference. Change the World.

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