



159 N. 25th Street, Camp Hill, PA, USA, 17011-3609

Jeff Bartholomew Tribute

1940-2024

There are thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of people around the world who have a connection with UCWDC. We are competitors, spectators, teachers, choreographers, judges, event directors - all lovers of dance and music. We have made friends; we have found our soul mates; we have experienced the magic.

Many of us have been around since the beginning of this organization. At this point in time, many more have not. This is a tribute to the one man whose dedication, talents, and foresight brought it all together and made it happen.

The man behind the magic is Jeff Bartholomew. He has gifted many of us with a life we have loved. He has gifted countless others with a pastime that has afforded many hours of enjoyment and a chance to advance in the world of dance.

Jeff is the force behind it all. He is why UCWDC exists as it does today. He is a brilliant, multi-talented man in so many diverse areas. He brought all these things to us at UCWDC and shared so that we could grow both as an organization and as individuals. He gave us the confidence and the direction we needed to build an international dance world.

There are many stories about Jeff - many, many stories! His personality, the character of this man are what make him unique, why he was the man to get the job done.

Jeff Bartholomew was born in Johnson City, New York, on February 1, 1940. His mother and her best friend Margie had their babies on the same day. Margie's husband was a musician; Jeff's parents were dancers. Jeff and Vonnie spent many hours as little children in the clubs listening to great music and learning basic dance steps - especially swing. Jeff still loves swing to this day.

In July of 1945, Jeff had a bad fall - bad enough to crack his skull open. It took about a year of isolation and bed rest for it to heal sufficiently to put a permanent metal plate in his head. Has Jeff ever been called hard-headed? Because of this metal plate, he was restricted from playing any contact sports. He spent his time taking music lessons, playing the piano - and was quite good at it. He got involved in photography, was a member of the camera club and the choir.

A recruiter in 1958 actually talked Jeff into enlisting in the Navy. He went to boot camp and was immediately discharged when they found out about the plate in his head.

It was then that he took up dancing more seriously - taking lessons at Arthur Murray's and eventually teaching there in Binghamton and later in Wilmington, Delaware. He did numerous competitions with his students during this time.

In 1971 he joined the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Peter and Paul church choir. Besides singing locally, the choir also performed in Italy. They sang at all the basilicas in and around Rome. That remains one of the great highlights of his life.

In 1979 Jeff moved to Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, and became a franchisee for the Burger King Corporation. Management skills he learned there served him well in later years.

In 1982 there were lots of clubs opening that offered dancing to live music - and dance he did! Lynn met Jeff in 1984. She saw the 'big guy' out on the dance floor and knew she had to dance with him. He and Lynn became dance partners and danced primarily at the *Winner's Circle*. More and more couples were coming out to dance. Some were decent dancers - most were not. Jeff, being the dance teacher he had always been, said to Lynn, "I can help these people."

So they started group lessons - dancing to a boom box. And it was free for everyone. He formed a second group for the more experienced dancers and he helped to 'teach the teachers'. The diplomacy was evident in making everyone feel valued. No fees were charged for this class either - he just wanted to share his knowledge.

When Lynn ended their dance partnership because of a work obligation, Jeff continued to teach at the *Winner's Circle*.

Country western dance by this time was taking off in a big way all across the United States. There were rules for dancers out west, there were rules for dancers in the northeast, there were lots and lots and lots of rules.

Jeff enlisted the aid of the most prominent teachers, choreographers and dancers and got them in the same room at the same time for a long and productive meeting in Harrisburg. He came prepared with by-laws and a vision. A name was chosen, rules were developed, judge certification was introduced. He also had the amazing foresight to insist that we host a World event. He said if we didn't do it, someone else would beat us to it.

So let's go back and take a second look at the talents and character of Jeff Bartholomew - and what he has brought to the table to make this organization what it is and to make each of us better at what we do.

When Jeff was a young boy recovering from a cracked skull, which limited his activities, he threw himself into helping his father at the pharmacy and his mother at home by taking care of his two younger brothers. The caring side of Jeff only grew stronger along with his unequaled insight into how to deal with people. In talking with many folks about their memories of Jeff through the years, the thing most remember is his kindness. He always has a smile and a positive attitude. And the hugs - always the hugs! This warmth and genuine love for people was especially evident in many of our UCWDC meetings while he was our president. When someone presented a proposal to become an event director, it was the president's job to deliver the verdict of the Council. Often it fell on Jeff to deliver the news that their application had been denied. But because of his magic, he could make that person leave the room smiling and hopeful and determined to return. Jeff always extended an offer to help.

Jeff loved the children and pushed to get them into our competitions - creating a competition platform just for them. And scholarships!

Frequently, in the old days, after many of our late night UCWDC meetings, we would go as a group to eat dinner - to fraternize, to grow closer - which led to better working relationships. If there were ever children seated in the restaurant, Jeff would pull out his scarves and his quarters and perform his magic, leaving them with smiles on their little faces.

Jeff was able to incorporate his extensive knowledge in both dance and music and bring that to us in fascinating ways. Even photography entered the picture! He used analogies which helped us remember. He was always well versed in the history of a particular dance and was so knowledgeable about music theory. He connected the dots. So many have said how enlightening it is to talk with Jeff. I taught many Judge Certification classes with Jeff throughout the years and have learned something new every single time - a deeper understanding of music, a better way to explain. He opened the door to understanding. He never ceases to amaze.


Jeff would go out of his way to help anyone learn, to help anyone that needed him. He shared his knowledge - he didn't hoard it. It was not about money for him - he was a teacher with a true desire to help. At one point he had put together one of the very first scoring systems - a genius in that regard as well. He had sent that system to Sue Boyd for one of her first events - she wisely got two computer experts to run it for her. She found out Thursday morning before the event that the two had not even opened the huge binder. No data had been entered, no contestants registered. She called Jeff that morning and he said not to worry. He got in his motor home, drove 15 hours and a thousand miles, and showed up in Tallahassee at midnight. He stayed up all night long and, as if by magic, the event ran smoothly.

Jeff knew the law, penned our by-laws, knew Robert's Rules of Order, knew how to get us incorporated. He had firm ideas about where we should be going and, through his strong leadership, we got there. He has been a role model for those that have followed. He put us on the path to success. His love for dance and, more importantly, his love for each of us has never wavered. We are all destined to leave this earth. But Jeff Bartholomew will never, ever leave our dance world.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Jeff's very good friend, Sue Boyd.

With a Heavy Heart,

UNITED COUNTRY WESTERN DANCE COUNCIL

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Armbruster". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Keith Armbruster
UCWDC President