



the
FAMILY
tree

Following the Adrian College tradition

by john ortega

The Tennants are one of the families with a long tradition of attending Adrian College. Clockwise from far right are **Shirley Crist Tennant '67** (who started it all), **Karen Pugh Tennant '79**, **Stephanie '04**, Ashleigh (who is in high school), Shirley's husband John, their son **John '79**, and AC sophomore **Phil Tennant**. The photo was taken at Stephanie's graduation last spring.



submitted photo

A need to complete some unfinished business and a desire to pursue a career in education prompted **Shirley Crist Tennant '67** to return to school at Adrian College in 1960. But she had no idea at the time that she was starting a family legacy.

Tennant, who is now retired and living with her husband John in Harrisville near Lake Huron, gradu-

And John began dating his wife, **Karen Pugh Tennant '79**, when both were seniors at the school.

"I did not pressure any of my [three] boys to go to Adrian when it came time for them to make a decision about college," Shirley said. "But I did steer them away from the larger schools. I had grown up in a small town, attended a small high school and felt comfortable at a small college like

lege, but stopped attending school because she had "no idea" what she wanted to do when it came to a career.

"I dropped out, worked for a while, got married and started to raise a family," she said. "But I always had this feeling that I left so many things undone. That I left some things unfinished and that's not the type of person I am."

So in 1960, the then-mother of two young boys began attending night classes at Adrian with the goal of earning a degree and becoming a teacher.

"I was happy," Shirley said about her educational quest that eventually took seven years and resulted in an elementary education certification with a concentration in English, and in history and science. "I never got discouraged with the pace of my education. I just figured if you kept working at it, it would take care of itself in the end. I just did what I could because you have to remember that I was still raising a family and doing all the cleaning in the home and most of the cooking."

The elder John Tennant, who spent

"It was pretty cool being the third generation of my family to go [to Adrian]"

ated from Adrian with a bachelor of arts degree in English. Little did she know two more generations of her family would follow in her footsteps.

Her oldest son, **John '79**, studied business at AC, and his oldest daughter, **Stephanie '04**, studied mathematics and elementary education. John's son Phil is currently a sophomore at Adrian majoring in business.

Adrian, at least when it came to working toward my undergraduate degree. And I felt like they were cut from the same cloth as myself in that regard."

Shirley graduated from Deerfield High School with honors in 1953 before attending nearby Adrian from 1953 to 1955. She did well academically during her first two years of col-

much of his adult life working a full-time job and raising crops on 230 acres of the family's farm in Deerfield, described his wife as someone who always loved school. His son John still chuckles about the day in 1966 when he and his younger brothers Brian and Bradley attended a class at Adrian with their mother because heavy snows had led to the closure of their elementary school.

"I remember sitting in the back of the class with my brothers and not making a sound," John said. "I think she must have brought a bunch of coloring books for us to draw in to keep us occupied."

The importance that Shirley, who earned a master's

The Legacy Scholarship

Along with tradition, there is a financial benefit for students who choose to follow in the family footsteps. The Legacy Award is provided to incoming students who have parents or grandparents who are Adrian College alumni. The award is valued at \$1,000 and is renewable for a total of four years. Since 1998-1999, a total of 236 students have received the award.

degree in counseling from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti in 1970, placed on education was not lost on her sons. And John, who is a senior director of operations finance with Gateway in Sioux City, Iowa, said he's glad he followed her lead to Adrian.

"I felt really comfortable

there," he said. "All of the professors were very approachable and would meet with you if you had questions. And I realized later how good of an education I had received because I was very well prepared to handle the challenges of my future studies."

Karen Pugh Tennant '79, John's wife, attended Wayne State University in Detroit as a freshman, but transferred to Adrian because she liked how small it was.

"Wayne State was just too big," she said. "You just felt like a number. I had one class at Adrian in which there were only seven students. That was great. It was very conducive to learning. And I much preferred that to being in a lecture hall with 500 other students."

Stephanie Tennant, John and Karen's daughter, teaches developmental kindergarten at Madison Elementary School in Adrian. Stephanie considered attending large universities such as Florida State and Colorado (Boulder), but she chose Adrian because of her family's ties there, its geographic proximity to many of her relatives and the intimate feel of the 100-acre school.

"It was pretty cool being the third generation of my family to go there," she said. "And because it's so small, it was easy to meet people. I don't think I would have met as many people as I did had I been at a big university. And everyone in the education department seemed to know

you. And because they knew you, it made it really easy to go to them and seek help when you needed it."

The opportunity to play college basketball influenced Phil Tennant's decision to attend Adrian. And though he stopped playing after his freshman season, he remains happy with his choice.

"I saw my Dad do well after graduating from Adrian, so that factored into my decision to come here," he said. "There is just a nice, tight-knit community of students here. You know who everyone is and everyone seems to know who you are and everyone seems to get along."

With Phil enjoying his time at Adrian and with Stephanie being a recent graduate, it would be easy to assume that their younger sister Ashleigh will attend the college after graduating from high school in 2007. But no one in the family expects that to happen.

John said his youngest child has expressed a desire to go someplace other than where her siblings have gone or are going. Karen, Stephanie and Phil expect Ashleigh to attend Southern Methodist because of the school's strong dance and cheerleading programs and its warm-weather locale in Dallas.

"She wants to discontinue the trend," Phil said. "Once that becomes official, I'll give her a hard time about it for a little while. But honestly, I just want her to go where she's most comfortable and where she'll be happy."

Like so many of the Tennants have been at Adrian.

John Ortega, who has more than 18 years of writing experience with the Los Angeles Times, is currently a freelance writer from Jackson.

