

PROFILE

KENNY G:

Accounting degree instrumental to sax symbol's success

By Nancy G (a.k.a. Gardner)



Saxophonist, songwriter and Seattle native Kenneth Gorelick (BA 1978), a.k.a. Kenny G, is about as famous for his overflowing mane of ringlets as he is for his smooth jazz.

Few may realize that the 51-year-old developed his musical talent while a student at Franklin High School and later after hours while he studied at the UW Business School. An accounting major by day, he often worked nights performing in local clubs with the likes of Johnny Mathis, the Spinners and Liberace. His first big gig came when he was just 17 years old and played as a sax soloist for Barry White's Love Unlimited Orchestra.

Last November, "I'm in the Mood for Love... The Most Romantic

Melodies of all Time," was released, and the contemporary jazz musician has been touring the United States and Asia since then to promote it. The soprano saxophone player now resides in Southern California, but confesses to missing Seattle's rainy days when he was content to just stay inside and practice.

More than two decades and 70 million albums later, the sax icon and Grammy Award-winner recently talked business and pleasure between tour stops.

NG: You've collaborated with a number of musicians over the years, including Steve Miller, Aretha Franklin, Natalie Cole and LeAnn Rimes, but are there other artists you would like to do projects with?

KG: I always wanted to do something with Luther Vandross (who passed away in 2005). But mainly I really enjoy doing my own music my own way. I don't like collaborations that much.

I heard somewhere that the late UW music Professor Roy Cummings greatly influenced your career. How so, and who else has helped shape your style?

Roy introduced me to the jazz greats like Charlie Parker and John Coltrane and encouraged me to expand my musical vocabulary. He also hired me to play in many professional ensembles and that gave me invaluable experience.

Other people who influenced my career include my high school band composer-in-residence. He also showed me a lot of things and was responsible for getting me my first gig with Barry White. And also, a local funk band named Cold Bold & Together (back in the '70s) was led by a man named Tony Gable and he also gave me a chance to play in a predominantly black band which again gave me invaluable experiences.

Where were some of the local venues you played while in Seattle?

I played a club called the Golden Crown (no longer in existence), the District Tavern, Paramount Theatre, Pier 70 and Bumbershoot.

What do you like to listen to when you're just kickin' back?

I listen mainly to traditional jazz—pick any of the jazz greats and you will find them in my music library.

What other instruments do you play?

I play clarinet, flute, oboe, and a tiny bit of piano.

Your music is especially popular in Asia—why do you think this is?

That's hard to say. I think the Asian melodies have some similarities to the melodies that I compose. I know that when I record a popular or traditional Asian melody, it feels good to me, so I think that I have an Asian heart. Growing up in Seattle and going to Franklin High School where there was a very large Asian student body must have influenced me in some way. It's always hard to know what ingredients of a person's life are the important ones... Sometimes things just happen without any conscious effort.

What made you decide to major in business?

I was always good with numbers and music didn't interest me in terms of a major. I always loved playing music, just not studying it.

How have you utilized your accounting degree in your professional career?

My accounting degree helped me do the books for my band for the first several years of my career. It was pretty easy. Then as things got bigger, it was too much for me to handle and I found someone to do it for me. With my knowledge of accounting, I was able to pick someone who I trusted and they knew that I was on top of this as well. It definitely helped me to invest wisely.

If you hadn't gone into the music business, where do you think you would have ended up?

Who knows? Maybe a professional golfer!

Speaking of that, Golf Digest recently named you the best golfer among musicians in its annual "Top 100 in Music." How did you become so good? Who are some of your golfing buddies? What's your handicap?

I started at the age of 10 (just like the sax) and played on my high school team. I didn't play on the UW team but tried out for the ski team and made the b-team. I play golf now with lots of fun and interesting people. I've played with President Clinton, Clint Eastwood, Tiger Woods and Arnold Palmer...just to name a few! I am a 0 handicap and I play each February in the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am. It's like the Master's for amateurs. ■

PROFILE

WENDY SVARNY-HAWTHORNE:

Caretaking the most precious asset

By Ed Kromer



Wendy Svarny-Hawthorne (EMBA 2003) is undoubtedly among the most remotely located CEOs in the USA.

She's the top executive at Ounalashka Corporation, the native village corporation of Unalaska (Dutch Harbor, Alaska), a small but bustling port town situated in the rugged Aleutian Islands, the dog-tail archipelago that stretches 1,200 miles into the Bering Sea.

So just getting to Seattle for the Business School's Executive MBA program every month was no mean feat. Svarny-Hawthorne nearly missed her first session, just weeks after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, though foul weather, not heightened security, was the culprit. "From then on," Svarny-Hawthorne says, "I would leave four days before class to make sure I'd get there on time."

Her journey to CEO was just as long and unpredictable. A native of Unalaska, Svarny-Hawthorne earned an associate degree at the Institute of American Indian Art in New Mexico before coming home to work as a professional artist. She joined Ounalashka Corporation as a receptionist in 1991 and eventually took over management

of shareholder affairs and the board of directors. In 1997, she test-piloted the corporation's new mentor program, created to develop a new chief executive from among its shareholders. With Ounalashka backing, she earned a BA in economics, was promoted to assistant to the CEO and, in 2002, took over the top office.

As CEO, Svarny-Hawthorne now manages Ounalashka's \$63.8 million in assets held by 450 shareholders, and guides the primary business of commercial and residential leasing in the nation's most prolific shipping port.

The Ounalashka Corporation was formed in 1973 under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which conveyed 120,000 acres to the local Unangan people. In the early years, the assets weren't always managed with a long-term perspective. "Some of the land was sold off in the beginning, and it was a big mistake," Svarny-Hawthorne says. "We don't sell our land. Ever. We have to protect it for future generations. Because it's all we have."

This unconventional corporate mission dictates that Svarny-Hawthorne pay as much attention to stewardship as she does financials and operations. As the primary asset of a people, Ounalashka's land is not only geographically strategic, it is historically rich beyond measure.

"If you listen to the oral histories, we've been trading for thousands of years—because of location, location, location," Svarny-Hawthorne says. "Our shareholders are the descendants of those peoples. I'm sitting in my office and looking out my window at an archaeological site of a house that's 3,000 years old. History is all around us all the time." ■