



# GRINDSTONE AWARD



**2015**

## **James N. Walters III**

### **Community spirit earns Jim Walters the Grindstone Award**

One of Jim Walters' favorite quotes is by Peter Kleist, the Cleveland builder and entrepreneur: "You don't need to do anything for me, but when you are able, I hope you will find your way to make a difference for others."

As an attorney, Jim has met "some very neat people," as he puts it, Kleist being one of them over a long and varied career.

That quotation is included in Jim's e-mail signature and sums up his dedication to helping out in his adopted hometown.

James Nash Walters III was born in Rochester, N.Y., where his father was an engineer. The family soon moved to St. Mary's, Pa., and then to Centerville, Ohio, where Jim grew up. He attended a small college in Iowa but then transferred to Ohio State where he earned a degree in English literature. Jim said he was inspired by a high school English teacher who encouraged him to write. He thought he would pursue a career in sales as his father had done. Then a friend dared him to take the LSAT – a prerequisite for entering law school. The friend even paid the test fees. "I had no intention of becoming a lawyer," Jim said. But as these things happen, Jim scored extremely high on the test.

In the meantime, he had met Dottie Ostojka-Steblecki, a sociology major at Ohio State, while helping a friend move into the Chi Omega sorority house. They married in 1969. She is a 1966 graduate of Berea High School, so when Cleveland State accepted him into its law school, they set their course for northeast Ohio.

Jim said his law practice "evolved" over the years. He started out as prosecutor in Elyria and then worked for Middleburg Heights law director Pete Geiger. He rented office space from James Carney in downtown Cleveland. While there, "I began to build a practice," Jim said. "I learned a lot." When he realized that most of his clients were from southwest Cuyahoga County, he moved his practice to Berea.

That's when the spirit of community pride and involvement hit. One of his first moves was to join the Jaycees – a civic organization of young business owners dedicated to helping the community. As part of a Jaycees fundraiser, Jim sold grapefruit door-to-door. One memorable customer regaled him with fascinating stories of Berea's history. That customer was Dorothy McKelvey, Berea's official historian and a founder of the Berea Historical Society. "I fell in love with Berea during those conversations," Jim said.

He went on to volunteer with the Berea Arts Fest and the Rotary Club of Berea, of which he is a past president. He is an active member of the United Methodist Church of Berea. He used his photography hobby to document Berea festivals and events and shared those pictures with whatever organizations needed them. In fact, many of the photos in Pat Mote's latest book on Berea were taken by Jim.

He volunteered for nearly 20 years for U.S. swimming clubs and the Berea High School swim team where he served as announcer at the local and district level.

He also served on City Council and has been law director under three mayors. In the past few years, he has emceed Berea's parades.

Growing his hair for Locks of Love has raised thousands of dollars for charity. "I grew my hair long in law school," Jim said. Later he decided to do it again but with a twist. "Friends and relatives suggested I donate it," Jim said. And Locks of Love, which provides wigs to cancer patients, was an organization he was familiar with. Lisa Kimpel at the Berea Post Office was too. She had been donating her hair to Locks of Love for years. "She called me a hippie with a tie," Jim said when Lisa noticed his shoulder length curls. They decided to donate the hair together. A barber suggested they sell tickets, which Berea Printing Co. donated. The winning ticket got to shear the locks. American Legion Post 91 donated the space. "We raised \$1,400 with no effort," Jim said. The proceeds went to The Gathering Place, which offers free support for cancer patients and their families.

Now Jim and Dottie are talking about retiring. They recently bought an RV and plan to be "homeless" for a year or two as they tour the country. In preparation, he recently sold his vintage record collection to Terry Stewart, former director of the Rock n Roll Hall of Fame. The 45s, 78s and LPs will be housed in a new restaurant in the Flats with which Stewart is associated.

Then it'll be back to Berea and family. Jim and Dottie have two children, James IV, "Jamie," of Jackson Township who is a township trustee, works for Infocision and is studying to become a pastor; and Betsey Burkey, a pharmacist at Fairview General Hospital; and five grandchildren.

"I really didn't serve on a lot of committees," Jim recalled. "I show up and help whenever someone needs help."

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