

Southeastern Indiana Musicians Hall of Fame
James "Jim" Helms
Musical Biography

Jim Helms induction as a member of the Southeastern Indiana Musicians Hall of Fame follows a long career and wide range of experience in the areas of education, and TV entertainment as well as being a performing musician. His education career spanned 51 years including 35 years in secondary schools retiring as a high school principal, and an additional 16 years as a college chancellor. However he also has had a long career of some 60 plus years in music and entertainment along the way.

Jim started on a ukulele at age 9, got his first guitar at age 12, and proceeded to learn and play it. He began playing with a country band, Dempsey Sims and the Melody Ramblers at the age of 14 and received his first ever pay of \$10 per night. He continued to play with Dempsey Sims and the Melody Ramblers for several years off and on even while attending college. He had also started playing with a Cincinnati based rock and roll band, The Rendezvous, around age 16 and was often playing with the country band one night and the rock and roll band the next night. Dempsey Sims and the Melody Ramblers recorded at King Records in Cincinnati and for Starday Records in Nashville/Madison, Tennessee. The band also played live on WMOH radio in Hamilton, Ohio in the late 1950's and into the 60's. At that time Jim played mostly rhythm guitar, but also played some lead guitar, bass, and sang. He also was an announcer on WMOH.

As if he wasn't busy enough, Jim had also started playing organ about this time and by the mid 60's was playing a weekly live organ show on WMOH radio. He began to devote much of his entertainment time to playing organ, which he would continue for the next 20 plus years. Jim signed a contract with the Chapelle-Johnson Entertainment Agency in Cincinnati in 1965 and worked with them playing organ for many years. He had several contracts over the years playing in the lounge a Glenn Schmidt's Supper Club (now the Syndicate) in Newport, Kentucky playing 6 nights per week from 10:00 PM to 3:00 AM. He also worked at other venues on occasion and often played the infamous Beverley Hills Supper Club.

Then in about 1970 Jim formed a duo by adding Jack Ketcham who was an excellent drummer. They were different at the time as they were more of a "Night Club Evening" kind of entertainment. They not only had people dancing, but they also greatly incorporated the crowd and individuals as part of the show. The show included music, dancing, organized crowd participation, as well as humor, jokes, stories and fun. Those shows normally ran from 9:00 pm to 1:00 am. The duo played many private clubs and for organizations as well.

"People would start arriving early to get the best tables and few ever left early. They began to refer to us as "The Showtime Two". These were great gigs with big, enthusiastic crowds. Many hilarious evenings were enjoyed by the audiences and we had just as much fun too." said Helms. "When reminiscing today about our years together, we still laugh and share many great memories."

The next phase of his career began when Jim became the House Organist/Announcer for pre-show entertainment at the Beef N' Boards Dinner Theatre for the Cincinnati Tri-State region. Jim played pre-show music, did some vocals, and introduced audience VIP's which included many area TV show hosts, performers, etc. The dinner theatre hosted excellent drama productions 6 to 8 shows per week and brought in Hollywood headliners to star in the shows. Then on Monday evenings when there was not a drama show, one night entertainers were booked. Jim usually played the preliminary for those shows too. Ray Charles shows came in often and Ray used Jim's organ equipment. Entertainers visiting included such as Pat Paulsen, Bob Cummings, Selma Diamond, Ricky Nelson, Wally and the Beaver, Richard Egan, Myrna Loy, John Carradine, Tammy Wynette, Brenda Lee, Vic Damone, Ceasar Ramero, Jim Ed Brown, comedian Woody Woodberry, drummer Buddy Rich, and many big bands such as the Glenn Miller Orchestra.

In addition to performing, Jim was involved in other entertainment related activities from the 1960's on. He has served as a Master of Ceremonies for many events over the years, as well as did public speaking for many groups at graduations, clubs, and banquets. Jim was also exposed to all kinds of entertainment and entertainers while shadowing and helping in the tech related areas at WLW Television and radio. He was involved in a lot of live TV, including Midwestern Hayride, the Paul Dixon Show, and news shows, as well as observing the news directors booth. He naturally met numerous people at WLW such as Paul Dixon, Bob Braun, Nick Clooney, Marian Spellman (her son would later be in Jim and Charlotte's wedding), Cliff Lash, Ruby Wright, Bonnie Lou, Willie Thahl, Peter Grant, Bob Shreve, Kenney Price (later on the Hee Haw TV show), and such who were all good people and excellent people from whom to learn.

Back in the late 1960's other aspects of entertainment came along for Jim; and the early years of entertainment, public speaking, and emcee work became very useful in things to come. Jim became a teaching colleague and good friends with band director Charles Green, North Dearborn High School and later East Central High School. (Charles Green is a member of the Southeastern Indiana Musicians Hall of Fame too and is now deceased; Jim later did the eulogy at Green's funeral) They became close friends and later Jim became very involved in helping Charles with the ECHS band at times with shows, planning and traveling with the band, as well as served as announcer for the band at many of their major events. The ECHS band, of some 250 to 300 members per year, became legendary and traveled widely to many parades, Florida, Indianapolis, and other mid-west locations. The band did TV commercials, recorded albums, and played for the Cincinnati Reds, Bengals, and Indianapolis Colts. During this time, Jim announced pregame and half-time shows at the stadiums. Annually, Jim and Charlie worked with Reds owner Marge Schott on her prep-committee for the Reds Opening Day Parade, which the band always led, and then played on the field. The ECHS band also played special events at Riverfront stadium which included Johnny Bench's Retirement Night program and Bengal quarterback Ken Anderson's Retirement with the band forming "Kenny" on the field for the ceremony. Other highlights included playing for the Red's World Series Championships

celebrations. The ECHS band also played for President Reagan, President Ford, and President Bush. Also present with the Reagan group was Bob Hope, Charlton Heston, Hugh O'Brian and Moe Bandy among others. 2018 inductee to the Southeastern Indiana Hall of Fame, Kenzie Bentle, also became involved at the same time and the three of us worked together. Another 2018 Hall of Fame member, David Kling, also worked with us until he left East Central to become the band director at South Dearborn.

In more recent years Jim has had the opportunity to travel in the Nashville music scene with Merle Haggard, Marty Stuart, Connie Smith, and Little Jimmy Dickens. Those were great experiences too in Las Vegas, Reno, Texas, Tennessee, Michigan, and many other locations. Jim is the MC for the Music on the River series in Lawrenceburg, which he has done for many years; and he is also a host of the Golden Eagle Saturday Morning radio show on WSCH, 99.3fm.

Jim expressed his sincere appreciation to the Hall of Fame committee for his induction to become a member of the Southeastern Indiana Musician's Hall of Fame. Further, Jim would like to thank the many musicians in the area who came before, as well as the ones who continue, to play music in Southeastern Indiana. He has known and played with many of the current members of the Hall of Fame. He especially would like to express thanks to Nelson Elliott, one of the leaders and founders of music recognitions in the area. Jim first met him when Nelson was a senior at Hanover College and Jim entered as a freshman. They also played some gigs together while in college, as well as some in later years. There have been many great musicians and entertainers from this area, and Jim is very happy to be recognized as one himself.

“Looking back, there were many late nights, lots of travel, loading and moving equipment, weather being hot, cold, rainy, snow, and whatever; seldom air conditioning anywhere years ago, and such... But it was all a great time and worth it... One great big gig! Wow!! And thanks!! !” - Jim Helms