

Caldwell Alumna Builds Cultural Bridges

What do an author, a musician, a radio executive, a writer and a chamber of commerce CEO have in common?

This intriguing range of titles belongs to a single woman: **Eileen Donigan Curtis '68**. We caught up with Curtis recently to talk about how her career began.

Curtis initially chose Caldwell for practical reasons. "I was a scholarship student. My family could not have sent me to college without financial support."

Her ambitions surfaced quickly as she took on 27 credits in her first semester, including two off-campus courses and honors-level study in English and history. As a music major, courses in voice and piano demanded hours of practice. In addition, she held a part-time job. Over time she developed a deep interest in the history and theory of music, which led to graduate study in musicology.

A chance conversation pointed Curtis toward a career in radio when she contacted WGMS, a Washington, D.C. classical music station. She lacked radio experience, but her pianist fingers aced the typing test and she was hired as an assistant music director, later becoming the station's music director.

While at WGMS, Curtis earned a Peabody Award for a series on the history of American music. She covered the Bergen Festival as a guest of the Norwegian government, and worked with the German government on a program about major German composers. She received Austria's Silver Medal for the Arts for her coverage of the Vienna State Opera's first-ever visit to the United States.

Curtis transitioned out of radio in the 1990s when the station changed hands. By then she was busy raising a family and working as a freelance writer. But

she wanted to work again, and she wanted something new.

Thinking the local chamber of commerce might be a good place to start, she showed up at a meeting wearing a name tag that said "Jobseeker" and introduced herself to the chamber's president.

"He saw my name tag and asked if I was comfortable talking to new people," she said. "I told him about all the celebrities, princes and heads of state that I had interviewed over the years. Before I knew it, I was hired!"

Under Curtis's guidance, the Herndon Chamber grew into the 700-member Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce and is now known for its commitment to diversity and for its contributions to STEM initiatives. Curtis, now retired, recounts the challenges and rewards of her chamber career in her self-published book, "Chamber Tales: A Memoir of Commerce, Community and Stunning Forces of Change."

What's next for Curtis? You can bet it won't be your typical retirement. "I want to fill in the gaps in my knowledge base, particularly on topics that are important to humanity: the environment, the divisiveness in our communities. I would like to begin a



blog and write a second book, possibly a travelogue." She also plans to spend more time with Marshall, her husband of 43 years, and her three daughters and five grandchildren. "I am blessed." ■

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EILEEN DONIGAN CURTIS

CHERISHED CALDWELL MEMORY
Studying writing with Sister Vivien.

MOTTO
Don't be afraid to try new things: jump in!

GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS
Receiving the Peabody Award and the Caldwell University Veritas Award.

EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES
Walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain; visiting the jungles of Peru; attending a Buddhist retreat in Nepal.

FAVORITE SIGHT ON CAMPUS
Sister Gerardine's stained glass windows.

ADVICE FOR STUDENTS
STEM and the liberal arts are equally important!

