

# John Riley '58

When he was a junior at NHS, John Riley dreamed of riding his motorcycle to Hollywood and becoming another James Dean. It would take almost 50 years to realize that dream. During that time, he would find a career in the food industry and fall in love with the theater.

Born in Kentucky, John's family came to Northridge when he was in the seventh grade. After he graduated in 1958, he worked for Dixie Candy and Fountain Supply Co. and Acme Miami Valley Vending Co. As Vice-president, he was in charge of all the food services for both Hara Arena and Wampler's Barn, as well as Kitty Hawk, Madden, and Community Golf Courses, Gaston's French Restaurant, and the Moraine Club. During this time he coordinated with Dave Herring, Principal of NHS, to provide jobs at Hara Arena for at-risk students.

He went on to manage the Forum Cafeteria at the Dayton Mall for three years and, in 1974, started his own 400-seat supper club in Franklin, Ohio, Benjamin's of Franklin Square. Ranked as one of the top 300 independent restaurants in the country, Benjamin's was a favorite stop for local TV personalities, members of the touring Kenley Players, and celebrities who were appearing at Memorial Hall. Col. Sanders of KFC celebrated three of his birthdays at Benjamin's.

In 1978, John began working for GZK Food Services as an area supervisor for six Arby's and later six Burger Chefs. Voted Best Manager at Arby's International Training School, he gave seminars and designed management training programs for the entire company. In 1982, John again started a new restaurant, "Benjamin's, the Burger Master", in Dayton, which he has owned and operated as president and general manager for 27 years.

John was bitten by the acting bug in 1987. For 22 years, he has acted in, directed, or produced over 75 stage plays in the Miami Valley in addition to performing outdoor dramas in southern Indiana and summer stock in Mt. Carroll, Illinois. He has also been Managing Director of Kettering Theater Under the Stars and Scenic Director at the Dayton Playhouse. John has won numerous awards of excellence for acting and, in 2003, was inducted

into the Dayton Theatre Hall of Fame. In 2006, he was awarded lifetime member status to the Dayton Playhouse, where he founded “FutureFest,” a nationally recognized annual festival of new plays now in its 19<sup>th</sup> year. In 1996, he started First Stage Productions and for the next five years brought 19 new, unpublished plays to Dayton. One of them was filmed and presented at the New York Film Academy.

Having done some film work in the Midwest, including two movies and a segment of “America's Most Wanted,” John hopped on his motorcycle and headed to Hollywood with his wife Marty. They lived in Los Angeles for two years while he acted in independent and student film and TV commercials. In 2004, they came back to Ohio to start his own production company. They built a retirement home, complete with a film studio and editing room. He is currently filming a Western, “The Line Shack,” and has several other projects in mind. John is a member of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), Actors Equity, and Film Independent.

As his many life experiences will attest, John's enduring philosophy is “You're never too old to dream.”

John and Marty (Staybrook—also class of '58) were married in 1995. He has two children, Tony (1962) and Stephanie (1967). Marty has two sons, Jonathan (1966) and Jason (1970). Together, they share three beautiful granddaughters, Julia, Janey, and Emma.