

Emmert Royer '39

"B-H-A means Better Home Appliances." A generation of kids in the Dayton area grew up singing that tune, and at one time, according to the Dayton Daily News, more people in the Dayton area knew the BHA song than the Star Spangled Banner. The man who put it on our lips was born in 1921 and graduated from Northridge High School in 1939. While at NHS Emmert Royer is arguably the first Dayton area basketball player to use a one-handed jump shot instead of the two-handed set shot. He was on the 1938 team that won the Montgomery County championship by defeating favored Farmersville 27-16. Emmert scored 14 points, just two shy of the entire Farmersville team. In those days Emmert's goal in life was to be a minister.

After leaving Northridge Emmert spent two years at Manchester College in Indiana. Then WW II happened and Emmert enlisted in the Army Air Corps. He wound up in the Aleutian Islands 1000 miles off the coast of Alaska and was there when the war ended in 1945. However, they had to remain on the island for several months. He spent six hours a day for the next nine months teaching himself to play the piano, never dreaming that selling pianos and teaching people to play would be his life's work.

After leaving the Army, Emmert enrolled at Ohio State University. He got a job selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door. At that time the average starting pay for a college graduate was about \$60 a week. Emmert was earning \$200 a week selling vacuum cleaners. He left OSU, got married, moved back to Dayton, and in 1949 started BHA, selling vacuum cleaners, appliances, and pianos. In 1955 BHA was listed in trade magazines as the largest single piano and organ store in the United States. At one time it was claimed that Emmert was the only man in Ohio to be able to play the piano with his back to the piano. Over the past 55 years BHA has taught over 5000 people to play the piano. Emmert still owns the store and is still active in its operation.

Emmert has participated in the Children's Downtown Dayton Parades, Kettering parades, and others with his famous companion, Toby.

Emmert has two children, both of whom graduated from Miami University. His son Bob is president of BHA and runs the business, although Emmert still puts in about twenty hours a week. Bob has three children, two sons and a daughter. Emmert's daughter Linda (O'Drien) retired as a high school counselor from Wayne High School and since then has published eight booklets of advice for teachers and students, selling over a million and a half copies in fifty states. She has two sons, both of whom graduated from Miami.

"One of my main goals in business was to get new people to enjoy playing the piano," said Emmert. "Since I taught myself out of chord books, I found it easy to teach others to play the piano. In fact, my greatest joy in business is to see new people learning to play the piano."



Star of BHA's 'Right, Toby?' commercials dies

By Khalid Moss, Dayton Daily News Staff Writer

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Emmert Royer, founder of BHA (Better Home Appliances), was a familiar figure in most area households. His quirky, TV commercials — often featuring the Maltese “Toby” — ran for five decades and his showmanship and knack for promotion were part of a well-calculated sales strategy that contributed to the success of his company.

Royer, who was 89, died Saturday, May 22 in Dayton. Emmert graduated from Northridge High School and is in the Northridge Hall of Fame.

Royer was a standout athlete at Northridge High School before heading overseas to fight in WWII. After the war he returned to Dayton and sold vacuum cleaners door-to-door. His success with vacuum cleaners led him to include home appliances. In 1953 Royer began selling pianos and organs in addition to appliances from his Main St. store. Royer moved BHA to its current location, 868 S. Patterson Blvd., in 1969. His son Bob joined the business in 1974 after graduating from Miami University. He said his father was not only an excellent businessman but also a great dad and a wonderful local personality. “He personally knew all the celebrities like Phil Donahue, Lou Emm, Don Wayne, Gil Whitney and many others. He was an icon in the piano and organ business for his promotion ability and free lesson program. We were Kimball piano and Conn organ companies largest dealer in the nation for a single store outlet.”

Royer said BHA, now in its 61st year of business, will continue to operate and grow. He said the company now sells more than \$1 million of pianos online.

Mark DePaul of Huber Heights was among the Miami Valley residents who remembered Royer, his dog and his jingle fondly Tuesday. Now 57, DePaul said he first saw Royer in person at the Montgomery County Fair at age 13. “It was a big thing to meet Emmert Royer,” DePaul said, noting that back then, Royer routinely gave kids who could recite the jingle a dollar. DePaul’s wife worked for one of Royer’s children. She was among those to share her condolences on his family on Royer’s Legacy.com page. “May it help to know that the legacy Emmert Royer left behind will always be remembered,” she wrote. Amelia Robinson contributed to this report.

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