

PERSON OF THE WEEK

An Engineer and a Problem-Solver

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By **Becky Coffey**

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WESTBROOK – It was at a benefit in the 1990s for High Hopes Therapeutic Riding Academy that friends and family of Gerry Dyar bid on an unusual offering on his behalf: the opportunity for him to conduct the New Haven Symphony in Woolsey Hall playing John Philip Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever*.

"It was most terrifying thing I've ever done, to get up on that podium at Woolsey Hall and conduct the New Haven Symphony," Gerry says.

Gerry has loved classical music from the time he was just 11 years old. It may have been this passion for music that led him to his first career in audio/electronics engineering.

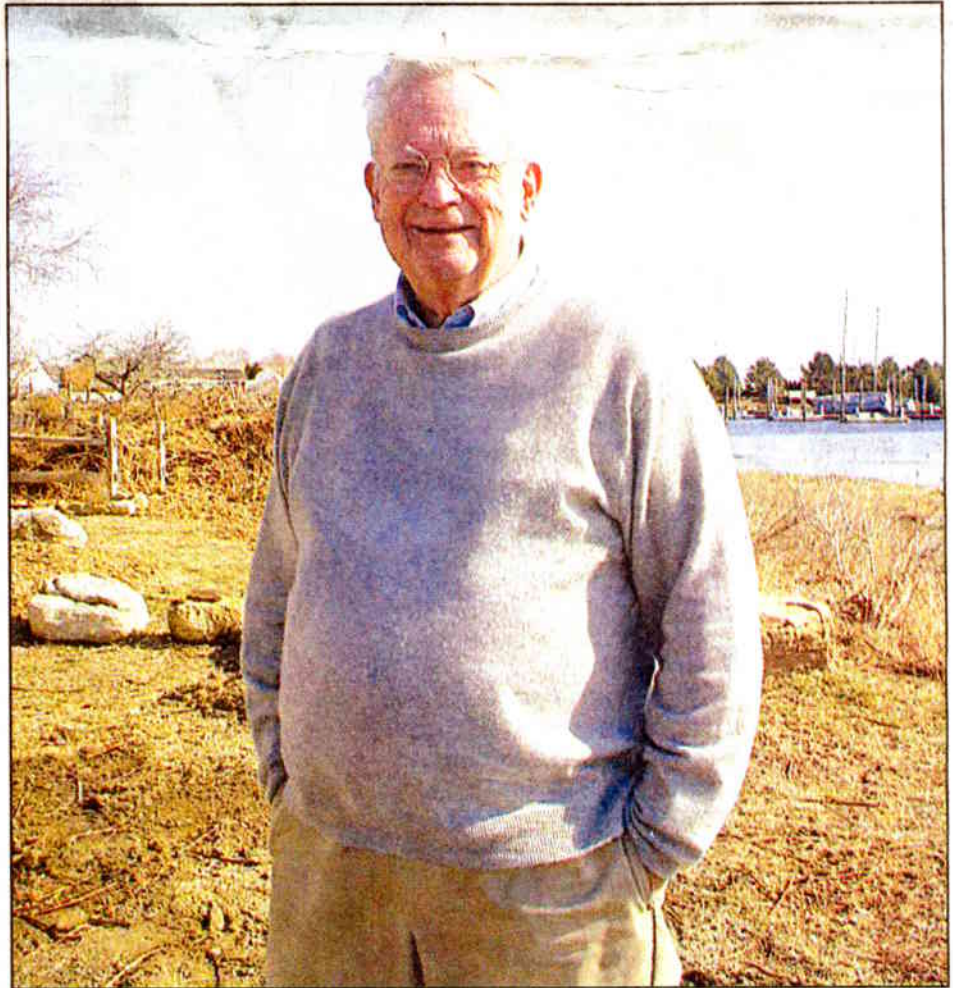
"I started out in high-fidelity, working for a high-end custom shop and ended up designing radio stations and recording studios throughout Connecticut," says Gerry. "I also produced the live broadcast concerts of both the New Haven and Hartford symphonies for public radio."

But then in the 1970s, computers gained rising importance as a tool in business analysis and data processing, but few people were trained in computer hardware. So Gerry was enticed shift careers, and he joined Travelers Insurance as one of the firm's first employees in data processing. He promptly spent a year going back to school to learn more about computers. For the next 12 years, he used his new knowledge and his electronic engineering expertise to direct operations research at the company.

"I have always enjoyed the process of quantitative problem-solving, of getting to a solution," says Gerry, who also is fascinated with doing crossword puzzles.

"I consider myself a Thursday *New York Times* crossword puzzler," Gerry notes. He says the hardest weekly puzzles are printed in the Friday and Saturday editions. His wife of 52 years, Helen, says his skills really make him a Friday puzzler.

Today, in semi-retirement in Westbrook since 1993, he pursues his third career as a registered fee-based financial and business advisor, a profession he's worked at for more than 20 years. When he first moved to town full-time, Gerry joined the



Gerry Dyar chairs the Westbrook Council of Beaches Association, an umbrella group that coordinates the activities of 17 town beach associations. **Photo by Becky Coffey**

Westbrook Chamber of Commerce to get involved in the local business community. But it was the proposal by the Department of Transportation (DOT) to close Route 1 for two years while they replaced the "Singing Bridge" that moved him to take a leadership role.

He believed that the town's business community needed more clout to get DOT to reconsider. He suggested aligning the Westbrook Chamber of Commerce with the much larger Middlesex Chamber of Commerce in Middletown. When the two groups did merge, Gerry then became the president of the new Westbrook Division of the Middlesex Chamber, a post he held for five years and stepped down from only late last year.

Four years ago, Gerry's leadership was recognized by CREPA, the regional planning

agency, and the CREPA board appointed him to the state's I-91 Transportation Investment Area Board of the statewide Transportation Strategy Board. Later, he was appointed to the statewide I-95 corridor study group. The groups' reports included various recommendations to improve the transportation corridor, including support of the area's train transportation systems and train stations.

The Westbrook Division of the Chamber of Commerce, with Gerry as its president, has long supported efforts by town and state leaders to find ways to improve and retain the Shoreline East train station in Westbrook. The most recent proposal to trade the town garage site to DOT in exchange for the state road maintenance

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site at Exit 64 is currently being studied for viability by new town leaders.

Gerry personally has had a lifelong fascination with trains and streetcar transportation from the time he took his first solo train trip at the age of 11. From an early age, he would scour old antique shops for electric trains to build his collection. But when he went off to college, he decided to sell his collection, and the proceeds paid for his first two years of college tuition.

"I always wanted to be a motorman," says Gerry.

A few years ago, he joined the Branford Electric Railway Association and realized his dream by training and becoming licensed as a streetcar motorman. After earning his license, he would sometimes volunteer as a motorman on the association's streetcars.

Most people today in Westbrook probably know Gerry as the president of the Westbrook Council of Beaches (COB)—a role he assumed four years ago. The COB is the umbrella group that serves the town's 17 beach associations and the 570 dwelling units built in these beach areas. Through meetings and mailings, the COB disseminates information of concern to the town's beach association members. These issues include parking, harbor management, property revaluations, and town referendum votes.

The COB also has its own website, www.westbrookcouncilofbeaches.org, for which Gerry serves as webmaster. A few years ago, Gerry researched absentee balloting procedures and posted this information on the COB website.

"We have more than 200 hits per month on that page of our website," Gerry notes.

Gerry has also been instrumental as part of the organizational core of the new group calling itself C3, the Connecticut Coalition of Communities. The group's goal is to work in the State Legislature to reform the property revaluation process.

"We're not telling towns how big their budgets should be, we just want people to keep their homes," says Gerry. The group was incorporated a year ago, and he serves as its vice president. He is optimistic that the group will begin to see results of their efforts in this legislative session.

When Gerry's not at work on community issues, he's working to automate the systems in his home using his engineering skills, computerized controllers, fans, and programmable thermostats.

"Eighty percent of the lights, the heating system, and a secondary system that circulates solar-heated air around the house are all automated," Gerry explains. But in a nod to Helen, he has manual overrides for everything, just in case.