

FINAL VERSION

Inspirational presentation

by Vicki Schmitz-Block, Dietrich Schmitz and Julie Schmitz Broker

Southwest Seattle Historical Society

Champagne Gala Brunch

Saturday, Nov. 8, 2014, Salty's on Alki

VICKI

Good afternoon. Thank you all for coming out today to this lovely setting for this grand occasion. As Clay said, my name is Vicki Schmitz-Block.

DIETRICH

And I'm Dietrich Schmitz.

JULIE

And I'm Julie Schmitz Broker.

VICKI

For just a few minutes, we want to share with you a bit of our story – our West Seattle story. Of course, we trust that you will find some of your **own** story in ours, because we all have gathered here today for a common purpose – to show our **appreciation**, and to **share** and **celebrate** and **support** the heritage of this wonderful peninsula that we call home.

DIETRICH

Of course, the core of our story is our family, the Schmitz family. It goes back several generations here in West Seattle, and it seeped into our souls long before we came to recognize it as adults.

JULIE

It is a **legacy** – a legacy of civic duty, of giving back, of gratitude for what we have been given. And it has stuck with us all, whether we have stayed in West Seattle, or – like me – have moved thousands of miles away.

VICKI

So who were the original Schmitzes? All of you in this room have **heard** the name.

- We know it from **Schmitz Park**, the cathedral of old-growth timber that rises from Alki up the hill to the Admiral District.
- We know it from **Emma Schmitz Viewpoint**, the stretch of land along Puget Sound next to Beach Drive.
- We know it from **Schmitz Park Elementary School**, where every year since the school opened more than 50 years ago, a Schmitz family member has spoken at the opening-day flag ceremony.
- We know it from **Schmitz Hall** at the University of Washington.
- And most recently, we know the Schmitz name because the log that became the totem pole that was restored and **gloriously** unveiled last June at the Log House Museum was harvested from – you guessed it – Schmitz Park!

The original West Seattle Schmitz was **Ferdinand**, who was born near the beginning of Abraham Lincoln's first term in 1860, but on the other side of the globe, in Germany. He was **not** his parents' eldest son, so he knew he would **not** inherit the family property.

In his 20s, Ferdinand came to the San Francisco Bay Area, tried and failed in business, and with a few coins in his pocket, he headed north to Seattle to start over again. Later, he sent for his childhood sweetheart, **Emma**, and she arrived just one day after the Great Seattle Fire of 1889.

Ferdinand was a natural businessman, serving on the Union Savings and Trust board, and it wasn't long before he acquired property. He owned three hotels downtown, including Seattle's finest, the Butler Hotel at Second and James. He had some of the most prominent Seattle businesses as his tenants, including Bartell Drug and Frederick & Nelson.

He also bought land in West Seattle. His dream was to **settle along Puget Sound**.

By 1904, the Schmitz home along Beach Drive was completed. It was called San Succi – French for “without care.”

Three years later, this peninsula of West Seattle annexed to the rest of Seattle, and Ferdinand soon was appointed to the parks board and was elected as the **first** member of the Seattle City Council from **West Seattle**.

In 1908, Ferdinand and Emma Schmitz made their most significant contribution to the city. They donated **30 acres** of land near their Beach Drive home for a park, on one condition – that it never be logged. Thus was born Schmitz Park, which eventually grew to 53 acres.

The four children of Ferdinand and Emma were no less formidable and public-minded.

- **Ferdinand Schmitz Jr.**, who was born at San Succi, was an industrialist rising to leadership positions at Pacific Car & Foundry, Summerville Steel and Berger Industries on Harbor Island. He was president of Everett Pacific Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, and he was a driving force in the Lighthouse for the Blind.
- **Dr. Henry Schmitz** brought forestry to national attention at the University of Washington. For six years in the 1950s, he served the university as its president, and later he greatly expanded the educational scholarship opportunities there.
- **Emma Schmitz Hartman** was a longtime volunteer for the Red Cross, she was active on the boards of United Good Neighbors (today's United Way) and the Salvation Army, and she rose to be national president of Camp Fire Girls.
- **Dietrich Schmitz** became president of Washington Mutual Savings Bank, served on the boards of Safeco, PACCAR, Seafirst and Boeing and was elected to the Seattle School Board, serving **31** years, a record that still stands today.

It is through Dietrich's son, Alan, that I became a member of the Schmitz family. I married Alan in 1968, and somehow I became a good fit. I was the daughter of a police chief who was **always** helping people in our small town.

I learned at an early age that all you really need to do to when problems arise is to **get people together**, to get a **good mix**.

Not all things happen in corporate boardrooms. So my role has often been to be a catalyst:

- Supporting Fauntleroy Children's Center.
- Jumping into the political process (even once running for public office).
- Trying to promote public safety by founding the Friends of Schmitz Park at a time when the park needed help.
- Helping preserve the family traditions at Schmitz Park school.

I **also** see much of the Schmitz legacy in my children, Julie and Dietrich.

JULIE

For me, it's all about the values of **philanthropy** – of giving **back**, of the love of mankind and volunteer service – and it seems to be in **every** part of my life. Not on the front lines, but behind the scenes, as part of the infrastructure.

For many years, I worked at the University of Washington and in financial services.

But a few years ago, I moved to Texas, where I really found my home at the Executive Service Corps of Houston, one of 24 national affiliates – Seattle has its own chapter that you may know as 501 Commons.

I am really fortunate because I can work for a nonprofit that helps **other** nonprofits – just like the Southwest Seattle Historical Society – to get better at serving their missions.

We have helped **thousands** of organizations with everything from strategic planning to staff training to self-governance – and to do that game-changing work for organizations here and abroad that focus on a wide range of missions, including environmental education, literacy **and even** the teaching of beekeeping to empower and lift women out of poverty in Pakistan.

I am part of a team that supports 60 volunteer consultants, from for-profit executives to nonprofit professionals. I help **our** nonprofit prove its **own** worth so that it keeps being an affordable resource for **other** nonprofits.

When I'm not at work, I have a real heart for the arts. I volunteer with check-in and registration at the symphony. I also volunteer with the Association of Fundraising Professionals by helping to lead an annual citywide conference for more than **800** advancement officers who raise the money that their nonprofits need to thrive.

At home, my husband and I do a lot of informal counseling for people in their hour of need. It's nice to be the **go-to couple**, and I often think of my family's legacy of helping people. So does my brother, Dietrich.

DIETRICH

When I think about my family's legacy, one thing that comes to mind is that I serve as a **volunteer community chaplain** for the Seattle Police Department for the past 12 years. I minister to the community members affected by serious incidents, and I am in contact with them and their families, often being there for them in the first hours of a tragedy.

I do it because there's a big difference between going through a tragedy **alone** as opposed to with someone else. Many times the chaplain is the first person to be there. We show up and are **present**. That's our secret that isn't really a secret, but it's true. Of course, it can be a difficult job. I don't relish it or love it, but I can do it. I just do it because it needs to be done.

It also gives me the idea that I can have a role in this world to help make it a better place. "Am I in it for myself, or am I in it for **all** of us?" The concept of "self" is broadly promoted in our culture. But the wiser view is that we are all in it together.

My family gave me a sense that it's not all about accumulating material goods. You can live a more **enjoyable** life by helping the people around you to do better. It's very **practical**. It's in your own interest to be interested in the well-being of others. You're just **happier**.

I myself have been in the mortgage business for a long time, and when I think of Schmitz Park, it's easy to see how people could think, "Wow, imagine the great fortune you could make developing that prime land."

But that park is unique and **irreplaceable**. You can go into the park and **breathe**. You can watch people go in, and then come out, and see the difference in **how they look** as a result of having walked in that wilderness.

It makes me wonder: In the early 1900s, what was the thought process to donate a park in **perpetuity**? Who among us these days, if we had possession of that much land, would contribute it for the good of **all** of us?

VICKI

I feel like we are the guardians of treasures and the important gifts of our ancestors – the parks, the school and their dedication to education and service. There is also a sort of **institutional memory**, a genuine sense of **history**.

What says it best is the resolution passed by the city park board back in 1908 when the **first** West Seattle Schmitzes donated the land for Schmitz Park. These are their words:

*“This board appreciates the **fullness** of Mr. Schmitz’s and his wife’s **citizenship**. By embracing the opportunities which this city presented, they gained a **competence**. In a spirit of reciprocity, they are now favoring a **community** which favored **them**. This sentiment ought, and does, bring to them distinction. ... Their act teaches us that we, too, owe a duty to this city, which, as yet, has not been fully discharged. And we feel that their example will be emulated by others to whom this city has been most generous.*”

*“We cannot overlook one of the motives which prompted the donors, that is, that **labor** might be given the unemployed, that **hunger** might not reach their wives and children. Thus, in the inception of this gift, there is a **blessing**, and it will continue as one as long as children **walk** and **play** within the boundaries of Schmitz Park. And it will stand as a monument to the donors, of which their **children** and their **children’s children** will be more proud and more benefited than by the inheritance of wealth.”*

Wow. This text is so telling. **None** of us has 30 acres to give, but we **can** give our time and our resources. Sometimes it’s just about showing up. And maybe our community needs these values now more than ever.

All of this comes down to one word – **gratitude**, and we are so grateful for the Southwest Seattle Historical Society. The work that everybody in this organization does to preserve the photos, the stories, the historic, one-of-a-kind buildings, and yes, the **family legacies**, is **so** important.

It’s all about bringing people together for **a common purpose**. And what we are doing today, right now, in this room, is fundamental to our **happiness**, to our **satisfaction with life**, to our **sense of well-being**. We know that the heritage that we **share**, that we **celebrate**, that we **support**, has value to all of us and will one day have deep value to young people who may not realize it yet – young people like **we** were, like **all** of us were.

Right now, I would like to bring up all 27 members of the extended Schmitz family who are attending today’s brunch.

[They quickly assemble on either side. Once they are there, you continue.]

I ask **all of you** to think back to when you were a **child** and the influence of your **own** family. Your story is different from ours, but we all have common threads of **gratitude**. Those threads have become the ties that bind, that have connected us to **West Seattle**.

We hope that you have seen some of yourselves in our story, and we trust that you will give this organization your **full support**.

Thank you!