

Antique

AUTOMOBILE

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Jim Elliott

text and photos by WEST PETERSON



Jim Elliott has been an active AACA member since his senior year in college. He was elected to the AACA Board of Directors in 2016, and at the February 2020 annual convention in Philadelphia, he was commissioned as AACA President with his wife of 39 years, Donna, being installed as First Lady. Jim has previously served as executive vice president, vice president of Judging Administration, vice president of Finance and Budget, and vice president of Judging. Jim and Donna live in Yorktown, Virginia, and are members of the Historic Virginia Peninsula Region, Tidewater Region, and the Old Dominion Meet Association (a non-geographical AACA region comprised of 15 Virginia regions). They have raised three children, and enjoy their six grandchildren.

While Jim was born in the city hall of Marion, Ohio, he grew up in Upper Arlington, a suburb of Columbus. He played trumpet in the high school marching band and became a diehard Ohio State Buckeyes fan. When AT&T transferred his father to New Jersey, Jim's dream of attending OSU faded away. Instead, he received his undergraduate degree from the University of Delaware, and a law degree at the College of William and Mary.

Jim's interest in automobiles comes naturally. His maternal grandfather was a Buick mechanic in the 1930s and often took young Jim to the local junk yards. His paternal grandfather took him to his first antique car show while he was in grade school in Mechanicsburg, Ohio, and he remembers being fascinated by the parade of the antique cars. Back then, "antique cars" were all brass-era vehicles, and Jim loved the wonderful sounds they made.

Soon after, Jim began collecting Matchbox cars and assembling AMT and Revell models. Each fall, he'd pester his father to take him to the unveiling of the

“ Owners of cars that deserve awards should receive awards. Owners of cars that fail to receive awards deserve encouragement. — Jim Elliott

new cars, and he'd always bring home a ton of brochures and postcards that he'd promptly cut apart to assemble scrapbooks of Chevrolets, Buicks, Fords, etc.



When Jim was really young, his father had a 1955 Chevrolet and his uncles owned a 1956 Chevrolet and a 1957 Chevrolet. His grandparents owned a series of Buicks, beginning with a 1950 sedan, followed by a 1954, 1958, and 1961. His parents replaced their '55 Chevrolet with a 1960 Pontiac, which was followed by a 1965 Buick and then a 1966 Corvair convertible.

As a senior in college in 1972-73, Jim purchased his first collector car, a 1938 Buick Special four-door sedan. His father made his thoughts about it very clear: "If you can afford a car, you can afford your tuition." Jim thought long and hard, then decided to wait until his final semester before completing the purchase. His dad softened when the Buick arrived, even moving the Corvair convertible outdoors to make room for the '38 Special. Shortly after purchasing the Buick, a neighbor introduced Jim to a gentleman who was an AACA member, who promptly sponsored him into the AACA fold. (At that time, becoming a member required a sponsor.) Jim then drove the '38 to as many local shows as he could.

A couple of years later, when his father was offered a disappointing \$100 on the Corvair as a trade-in on a new 1976 Buick LeSabre, the Corvair became a birthday present when Jim turned 25. It was just the beginning of his collection. He still owns both the Buick and the Corvair, the latter now restored with AACA Grand National status. Since then, Jim has managed to fill up as much garage space as he can acquire, creatively tucking some 42 automobiles into any available space... all GM products, with the exception of a gorgeous 1928 Auburn phaeton.

In addition to automobiles, one of Jim's garages replicates a service station layout on one side, featuring a lobby and a back room alongside a three-bay service area, much like you would have found several decades ago. Within the lobby and back room are tons of interesting artifacts, both personal and whimsical, strewn about in a half-crazy semi-organized fashion ... each item grabbing attention like a kid in a candy store.

Jim loves competition and has been an Indianapolis 500 fan forever. As such, several of the vehicles in his collection are pace cars, some of which are actual "festival cars" having been driven by dignitaries during the May event: 1978 Corvette, 1980 Pontiac Trans Am, 1993 Camaro, 1998 Corvette, 2016 Camaro, and 2019 Corvette.

Jim has managed to fill as much garage space as he can acquire, stuffing some 42 automobiles into any available space. Below is Pat Nixon's 1973 Cadillac Fleetwood 75 formal sedan.



But Jim loves competition in another way, too. Out on the AACA show field. He has overseen the restoration of the majority of cars in his collection, all of which have found their way to an AACA Nationals event, from sea to shining sea. Other cars he owns include a 1903 Cadillac, 1928 Buick, 1931 Chevrolet, 1953 Chevrolet "Good Humor" ice cream truck (look for it in the near future, with Donna peddling delicious treats), Pat Nixon's 1973 Cadillac Fleetwood 75, and a 1978 Cadillac Eldorado, among others. His 1903 Cadillac was found in pieces in the Hershey Fall Nationals flea market in 2010. After restoration, it was awarded the AACA Brighton Era award. Because AACA provides the most national shows in which to compete each year, he finds it is the most attractive of all car clubs. Plus, he feels it has the best judging program.

Jim and Donna have attended nearly every AACA Nationals during his term as national director and rarely attend without a show vehicle. He enjoys every aspect of the antique car hobby and appreciates cars of all eras. He also shows his cars in local and regional events, in addition to exhibiting cars at Bloomington Gold (Corvettes), as well as at the Hilton Head, Boca Raton, Amelia Island, Greenbrier and The Elegance at Hershey concours, all the while promoting the benefits of AACA. His cars have earned almost every award achievable in AACA from Third Junior to national awards, and every award in between. As a result, Jim knows the challenges and rewards of restoring and exhibiting cars.

Along the way, he has met many folks and made a lot of friends. Within AACA's Tidewater Region, Jim currently serves as chief judge for their annual show. In addition to being a senior master judge with more than 150 judging credits, and having previously served as AACA vice president of Judging, he still receives phone calls and correspondence

from members all around the country seeking advice or needing answers on judging issues. He finds it a wonderful opportunity to meet new friends through this hobby, which is one of the most rewarding aspects of AACA.

When he was chairman of the Class Judging Committee, Jim worked to improve the judging system, feeling that it needed constant tweaking in order to meet the ever-changing needs of the membership. He admits that it can become a balancing act as newer cars enter the hobby, supplies of parts for older cars dwindle, and we are faced with the challenge of preserving the history of the automobile.

Jim wants to see AACA expand its membership. He says it is always mentioned and discussed, but it must become a priority. While all car clubs are experiencing a decline, he says AACA is the foremost club in America and needs to widen its appeal to the other clubs. "We must strive to invite younger car owners. This can be focused on the car owners with disposable income in their 30s and 40s and not just the youth in their 20s. Our activities need to be family friendly, so that younger couples look forward to bringing their children."

He uses his memberships in the Vintage Chevrolet Club of America, Cadillac-LaSalle Club, National Corvette Restorers Society and the Corvair Society of America to introduce others to AACA. Each year, he looks forward to working the membership booth at the Hershey Fall Nationals, believing the key component to increasing membership is to emphasize the fun that comes from being a part of the hobby. Additionally, he says we must do more to advertise our activities and encourage the general public to come to meets. "All of our cars have a past. It is up to us to assure their future."



Competitive from a very early age, Jim (left) at age 22 winning an award for his 1938 Buick. At age 25, his collection began when his father gave him a 1966 Corvair that was bought new. Jim still has both cars in his eclectic collection.

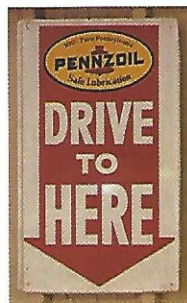


Jim is willing to bet that each AACA member knows someone who has an interest in cars but is not affiliated with AACA, stating that these enthusiasts need to be invited to region activities. "True growth in our membership will come from the region level. Our presence is always our best advertisement. People love to see our cars and reminisce about their automotive past. The best way to grow AACA is to have more shows and tours. In a nutshell, Jim is asking for creativity in showing the world the enjoyment we have with our cars.

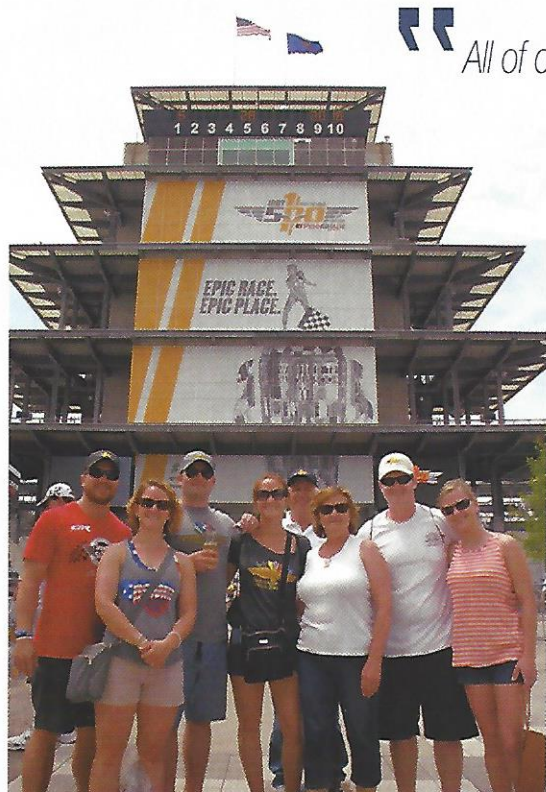
In addition, Jim wants to see AACA set its sights on achieving two primary goals for 2020 during his tenure as President. First and foremost, the Club must better promote itself to all segments of the old



Jim fills more than garage space as well, with interesting vintage automobilia displayed in the "gas station lobby" of one of his buildings.



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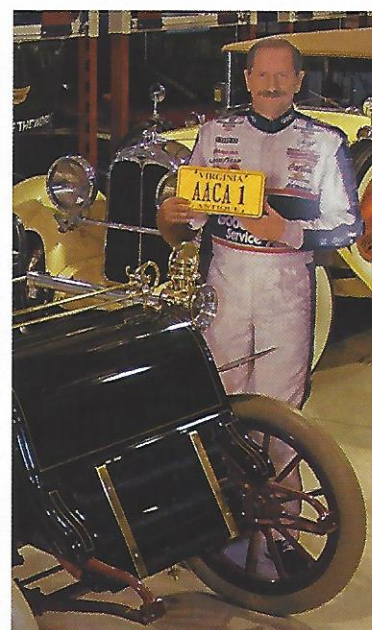
Jim's family at the 100th Indy 500. Left to right: son-in-law, Blake; daughter, Kristin; son-in-law, James; daughter, Jennifer; Jim; Donna; son, Rob; daughter-in-law, Sophia.



Jim (right) with Tom Sneva ...

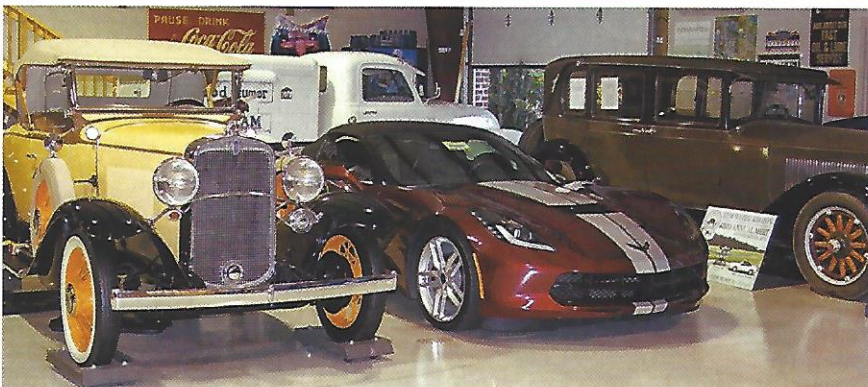


... and with Al Unser Sr.



car hobby, such as other car clubs, concours events, auctions (which have now become hugely popular), and even impromptu automobile events, such as local "cars and coffee" gatherings.

Second, and equally crucial for AACA's continued long-term perpetuation, is the successful completion of its new headquarters building, and the capital campaign that is funding it. With features and innovations that will efficiently serve AACA's staff and its members far into the future, the new building will guarantee AACA's continued success. Jim is proud that the AACA Library & Research Center is now considered the finest and largest automotive library in the world, and that it will be housed in the most advanced automobile club headquarters in the world. The new headquarters will further raise awareness of AACA and to increase its membership base, while the Library – in its monumental new home – will ensure protection of priceless automobile history and information.



For these important reasons, Jim feels it is essential that every AACA member participate in the capital campaign so that when the building is completed and dedicated this autumn, it will be fully funded with no debt, thereby increasing the ability of the Club to use its resources for much-needed new marketing initiatives, and to continue providing the first-rate service to AACA members.

Jim strongly believes that there has never been a more exciting time to be a member of AACA. As the new headquarters building – *your* headquarters building – nears completion, he looks forward with great confidence to participation in the capital campaign by every AACA member.