

# GARY WHITE

## SPEED

by Dave Wellman

**W**hen Gary White was a young teenager in Logan, West Virginia, before he was old enough to drive or shave, he worked at the local Dairy Queen. But Gary's job description had nothing to do with waiting on customers, making milk shakes or cleaning tables. In fact, Gary worked at DQ *before* it served its first "hot eats and cool treats" in Logan. "I did about 60 or 70 percent of the wiring at the Dairy Queen when I was in the eighth grade," Gary says. "And, it's still standing!"

***"He's a successful person who never forgets from whence he came."***

No one, not a soul, who knows Gary White is surprised that the building has survived for nearly four decades and today, in fact, thrives as Dairy Delight. Sure he was only 14 years old at the time and just helping out a neighbor who happened to be an electrical contractor, but he was born with skills most people only envy. Simply, his father says, Gary is "gifted." "He's mechanically minded," says the Rev. Glenn White, who's still in awe of his son's natural abilities. "He can do anything. If he was in the electronics business he would be extremely successful."

Gary is not in the electronics business. But, he is *very* successful as President and Chief Executive Officer of International Industries, Inc., a diversified natural resources company that employs up to 1,500 people in five states and is based in the tiny Mingo County town of Gilbert, West Virginia.

James H. "Buck" Harless, owner of International Industries, hired Gary on the Ides of March, 1992, and promoted him to president and

CEO a short three years later. Hiring Gary was one of the best personnel decisions Harless has made for the company he founded in 1946. "I knew I was getting a good person, that he was a good man," Harless says, "but I didn't know how good. Gary White is one of the most outstanding young men I have ever known. He is morally right and his integrity is beyond reproach. He is a great family man and a solid church man. He's an exceptional person."

Harless was so pleased with him that he wrote Gary's mother a note shortly after he hired him: "Thanks so much for having a son who has remarkable character and dedication to the task."

That rare combination of natural talent, integrity, exceptional work ethic, faith and confidence equals a successful and satisfying life for the 52-year-old, 1968 graduate of Logan High School. He and his wife, Jo Ann, are the parents of one daughter, 30-year-old Jennifer, who has cerebral palsy. They live in Mitchell Heights in Logan County and attend the same church, Central United Baptist, that Gary's father has pastored for the past 45 years. Gary is a trustee and choir member at the church, which he describes as "an extension of our family."

White grew up in Logan, attending Mt. Gay Elementary, Logan Junior High and Logan High, where he graduated near the top of his class of 600 students. After graduation, he attended Marshall University for two and a half years, then decided to pursue a weekly paycheck rather than a degree. "I began my business career," he says matter-of-factly of his decision to leave Marshall early. One of his first jobs was rebuilding and selling electrical mining equipment. Later, he would return to Marshall and complete his baccalaureate degree.

"The lack of a degree didn't adversely affect my employment," he says, "but it was an unfinished chapter in my life. Even though I've been very fortunate, it was a job left undone and I wanted to get it behind me." Despite his business success and savvy, Gary still plans to obtain an M.B.A. when time allows.

When time allows?

Certainly, his position with International Industries takes up most of his time. He also was elected in 2001 as the first chairman of Marshall's Institutional Board of Governors, another demanding responsibility, and one he takes very seriously. Gary is also president

of the Larry Joe Harless Community Center Foundation, Inc.; chairman of the Corridor G Regional Development Authority; a member and former chairman of the West Virginia Roundtable; chairman of the Appalachian Hardwoods Manufacturers Association's board of trustees; a member of the board of directors of West Virginia Media Holdings, LLC; and a member of the executive committee of the West Virginia Coal Association. He also serves as a vice chair for the Marshall Campaign for National Prominence.

When time allows?

Even away from work, every minute is in motion. By choice.

He cherishes his time at home with Jo Ann, who was his high school sweetheart, and Jennifer, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy when she was just nine months old. At that time, a doctor in Cincinnati told them to take Jennifer back home to West Virginia and make her as comfortable as possible because she would continue to grow weaker and weaker as the days passed. "The doctor said, 'You'll have her for a couple of years,'" Gary says today. He pauses briefly and smiles broadly. "She's a little tougher than the credit he gave her."

In April of this year, the Whites threw a "big bash" in celebration not only of Jennifer's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, which actually was in March, but of the fact that the doctor's prediction was so errant. Each day is a miracle for Jennifer, who beats all odds with every breath she takes. Gary says 135 people, including family and community members, came from near and far for a luau at the local country club. "It's always been one day at a time with Jennifer," Gary says. "Not only has she had our support, but the support of the community at large. She had a great time at the party."

Catherine White, Gary's mother, is well aware, and proud, of how Gary and Jo Ann have devoted their lives to Jennifer. The care they've shown their daughter is typical of the way they treat everyone, she says. "Through the way they've brought up Jennifer, and the many, many lives they've touched, they just reach out to everybody," Catherine says. "They help people they don't even know. They'll go to any extent to help people."

But Jennifer, Gary says, gets most of the attention. He says she's "the center of what Jo Ann and I do on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly

basis. She's our mission in life," he says. Admittedly, Gary says, knowing the challenges Jennifer faces each day has changed his and Jo Ann's perspective on life. Accordingly, they are totally committed to their daughter, and find joy in helping those in need.

The Whites do, indeed, try to make Jennifer as comfortable as possible at all times, while exposing her to the things she most enjoys. Jennifer, who is about 5 feet tall, weighs about 80 pounds and spends much of her life in a wheelchair, loves going to places she's not visited before, but also likes going to Myrtle Beach and Disney World. Her favorite destination, however, is much closer to home. "Her very favorite spot is the lake at Jenny Wiley State Park," Gary says, referring to 1,100-acre Dewey Lake.

The Whites first took Jennifer to the Prestonsburg, Ky., resort park in the Appalachian Mountains when she was six months old. They've steadily improved their "living" conditions there, from a pup tent to a large houseboat to a third, even larger, houseboat. They've also taken fast rides on runabouts on Dewey Lake, but last year bought a pontoon boat—a much calmer ride which Jennifer now prefers. "If you give her a choice of where to go, she'll pick the lake every time," Gary says. "Even if she's not feeling well, even if it rains all weekend, she loves it. She enjoys fishing, likes to boat ride and loves the water."

Jennifer has been tested by specialists from time to time over the years. The results are clear—she has above-average intelligence. Her limitations are physical in nature.

"You can't fool her," Dad says. "If you take her somewhere she's been before, she remembers. She has a very limited vocabulary, but either through speech or other actions, she can communicate with us."

"And just try," Gary says, "to sneak a pair of green socks on her when the rest of her outfit is pink."

"She goes nuts," he says, laughing.

Gary's love for Jennifer is immeasurable. So, too, is Jennifer's love for her Dad.

"Her face lights up when she sees him," Glenn White says. "He's her idol. She just kisses his bald head to death."

Clearly, family means everything to Gary White. But International Industries can be included as part of that family.

"I'm extremely fortunate to be where I am," Gary says. He speaks just as highly of Harless as Harless does of him. "I've worked with Mr. Harless for 10 years," Gary says. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He has captured the right philosophy of life. His legacy will be his philanthropy and caring." And, Harless knows a thing or two about the world of business and the people who make it all work—Gary included.

"He's a great people person," Harless says of Gary. "He handles people well and they respect him and like him. He's an excellent problem solver. He can get to the root of a problem and come up with a solution quickly."

Before joining International Industries, Gary was president of the West Virginia Coal Association for about seven years. He was manager of underground mining at Amherst Coal Company from 1975 through 1985, and was corporate training coordinator with Island Creek Coal Company from 1972 through 1975.

Since Gary has been with International Industries, the company has expanded considerably, particularly in the lumber division. "International Industries is a family of companies and individuals assembled over the years by Mr. Harless," Gary says. "He was recruited by a company to run a saw mill, and eventually bought the people out." International Industries owns property in seven states, and traditionally has been known for its position in the hardwood lumber business, and secondarily in the coal business. International Industries has four sawmills in West Virginia and two in Virginia, and produces 350,000 board feet of lumber a day.

"We're very nearly the largest single producer of Appalachian Hardwoods—wood that comes from Appalachian forests," Gary says. "And, we produce about three million tons of coal a year." The company (conglomerate) also has Benson International, a division with locations in three states, manufacturing trucking related parts, including bodies and trailers. They market them all over the United States, South America and Mexico. A fourth division, International Holding, maintains real estate in several states, including a Comfort Suites hotel in Mineral Wells, West Virginia.

White says running such a large company can be overwhelming at times. Since Sept. 11, 2001, though, the task has been more difficult than overwhelming. Business has suffered at companies nationwide since the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, and the crash of another hijacked plane in Pennsylvania. For the first time in International Industries' history, all of its divisions suffered at the same time.

"We actually sold a saw mill and were forced to lay people off," White says. "It's been a challenging year. Mr. Harless and I take the employment of people very, very seriously. We don't make decisions relative to employees or contractors lightly. We have a sense of obligation to continue to provide employment. Sometimes you have to make tough decisions based on the effect on the overall company, and it can be extremely stressful."

Gary said earlier this summer that business was starting to rebound. "I like to think we'll weather the current storm," he says. "We'll be there and some of our competitors won't." International Industries has more than 30 individual corporations and partnerships, Gary says. The company could not have grown the way it has without Harless' business "smarts," he observes.

"Mr. Harless' wealth has come not only from being a savvy businessman, but he has taken a modest salary from this company," Gary says, "and plowed it back into the company so it could grow. His wealth comes from outside investments. Buck Harless has wealth because he has always shared what he had with other people. I firmly believe there's a multiplication factor. Give a dollar, get back three."

Harless is not the only International Industries executive known for his desire to help people. According to A. Michael Perry of Huntington, recently retired chairman and CEO of Banc One West Virginia, and a close friend, Gary has a "caring and compassionate heart. He's a successful person who never forgets from whence he came," Perry says. "There's not an elitist bone in his body."

Of course, Gary and his brother, Keith, who is seven years his junior, had a solid upbringing under the watchful eyes of the Rev. Glenn and Catherine White. "I had some common sense, but a lot of

that was because of the way we were raised," Gary says. "We were just like everyone else. My dad always made a good living and provided, although we weren't wealthy."

Gary made excellent grades at Logan High School, but not the best in his class. Still, he was better prepared for higher education and the workforce than some because of the curriculum he took in junior high and at Logan High School. "High school and junior high were unique," Gary says. "They had a special advanced learning program at Logan High School in electronics. In order to qualify, you had to take an entrance exam and alter your schedule beginning in the eighth grade. You had to take algebra and science courses to get into the program at Logan High School."

Gary took the college preparatory curriculum, plus 1,200 hours in advanced electronics. Although he had no free periods and had to attend summer school each year, the experience and education were invaluable. "It taught me a lot about discipline," he says. "It set me up. We did it by choice. Our (electronics) class was less than 20 people, but we stayed together all through the high school experience. We took virtually all of our classes together. And in most of our classes, particularly math and science, we were expected to perform above and beyond the rest of the class."

When Gary says he left Marshall early to start his business career, he actually means he left to resume it. When he was in the sixth grade, he mowed lawns for money. In the seventh grade, he went from house to house in the neighborhood, washing and waxing cars. In the eighth grade, he helped his neighbor with electrical work, and also worked at an Exxon station. After his sophomore year, he was hired at Kroger, where he worked 32 to 40 hours a week. His mind raced at an early age; he had to stay busy, had to be productive.

Gary's never backed down from a challenge. He always has felt that if a person believes he or she can do something, half the battle is won. When he was a youngster, he'd take a clock apart and put it back together—just because he could. When he was in the eighth grade, he took a transistor radio apart, converted it into an intercom system, entered it as a project in the local science fair and won first place.

When did he figure out how to convert the radio to an intercom?

“While daydreaming in Sunday school,” he says. “Then I spent the afternoon wiring it, got it working, perfected it and entered it in the science fair.

“Some things just come naturally to me,” Gary says. “I can do about anything that I set my mind to. Some of it is natural talent and ability, but probably the core of all that is a reasonably high level of self-confidence. That’s more of it than anything. You don’t know you can’t do something, so you do it.”

As a youngster, Gary was influenced by many people, one of whom was a coach at Logan Junior High, and another of whom was Gary’s grandfather on his mother’s side of the family. The coach was Junior McClellan, whom Gary described as a strict disciplinarian. Because of his busy schedule, Gary didn’t have time for athletics at Logan, although he was a manager for one team in junior high. Still, he and McClellan developed a close relationship over the years. “We worked together and he took me under his wing,” Gary says. “Many, many years later his father became a member of my dad’s church, and my dad and his dad were inseparable for several years.”

Catherine’s father was a contract miner, and “a big influence in my life,” Gary says. “He was a truly ingenious person. If something broke, he would spend more time and money trying to invent something to replace it rather than buying a new one.”

Gary clearly realizes that others have played a big part in his success. Good timing hasn’t hurt, either. “I was involved in the coal industry when it was expanding,” he says. “I’ve worked with some wonderful people who’ve given me a great mentoring atmosphere.”

White surrounds himself with those strong people at International Industries.

“He’s very intelligent,” Perry says. “He recognizes that there are good, honest, hard-working, intelligent men and women out there who’ve not had the opportunities he’s had. That has caused him to have greater respect for the well-being of people he cares for.”

Perry often sees a side of Gary that others don’t notice. The two share a deep love of Southern Gospel music, and attend the popular

Gaither Homecoming concerts together when they come to Charleston or Huntington. Both enjoy singing hymns.

“I just like to sing,” Gary says.

Gary, in fact, is an outstanding singer. He performed in the all-state chorus for three years while at Logan High School. At Marshall, he auditioned for the symphonic choir and was selected—the only student among the 50 members who was not a music major.

Certainly, he enjoys the peace and quiet of home and the relaxation a few stanzas of “Amazing Grace” provide. But, he has another love—speed!

When Gary was six years old, his mother convinced him that if he went to the dentist she would take him to the local auto dealer showroom and let him ride in a children’s model Corvette. Gary said okay and took his first ride in a sports car.

“Ever since that day, I’ve loved cars,” he says. “There’s just something special about a powerful, fast car. I drive my vintage 1960 Corvette for fun. The rest of the time I drive a Cadillac STS with the Northstar system. It’s the fastest domestic luxury car made. I appreciate products that perform well and both of these cars can flat out run.”

When he finds time, Gary works on his Corvette at home, with Jennifer right by his side. “That’s the way he relaxes,” Glenn White says. “I go play golf. He takes Jennifer out there and works on his car.”

Gary, Jo Ann recalls, brought the Corvette home in a box and has been restoring it since. No big deal, Gary says of the shiny, red machine. “I’ve always fooled with automobiles and electronics. It came relatively easy to me.”

Gary did not inherit his dad’s mechanical skills. “There was little,” Gary says with a laugh, “to inherit. He can’t drive a nail.”

With all of his abilities, Gary could have moved out of West Virginia a long time ago. But, he and Jo Ann chose to stay in the Mountain State, for many reasons. A major factor was, and still is, Jennifer’s condition.

“My wife’s always been right there (for them),” Glenn says. “It’s a convenience for them and a joy for us.”

Gary loves West Virginia, and wants to see it improve in all areas. He's devoted to the state's education process, which he knows is directly tied to a strong future for West Virginia. Gary is a former member of the West Virginia Board of Education, a position he held for six years in the 1990's.

Perry says Gary is a role model "as to the importance of education, and what a person with humble beginnings can accomplish. He's an extremely successful business person who probably has the highest commitment to education possible," Perry says.

Without a doubt, White says, the education system in West Virginia is getting better. "But, it's far from where it needs to be." He notes that the state still ranks last in percentage of adults ages 25 and over that graduate from high school, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. "The state of West Virginia the last 14 or 15 years has moved light years ahead," Gary says. "But there's still a lot to do. Education is the fundamental basis to diversifying our economy in Southern West Virginia. You need well-educated, well-trained people."

Gary's focus these days is on higher education, which represents quite a change from his years (1994-2000) on the state Board of Education. Former Gov. Gaston Caperton appointed him to the state board. When Gary resigned six years later because of growing responsibilities and duties with International Industries, State Superintendent David Stewart praised him for his contributions. "Gary White brought tremendous business knowledge and astute leadership to the State Board," Stewart said. "His wisdom, insight and professionalism will be greatly missed."

Gary says serving with the Institutional Board of Governors at Marshall, and higher education in general, has been "a nice change of venue." "I've truly enjoyed working with higher education and Marshall University," he says. "Most particularly I've enjoyed from the beginning being involved in the process of bringing President Angel here. He's a person with vision. We made a good choice."

Gary says he's honored to serve as chairman of the Board of Governors, but sees his role as equal to that of the other 14 members. "The chair is not a position superior to other board members," Gary

says. "Marshall is fortunate to have the caliber of people it has around that table. They're all people who are dedicated to making Marshall successful."

The Board of Governors, formerly the Board of Advisors, began governing Marshall on July 1, 2001 as part of the governance system created by Senate Bill 653. One of the most serious tasks the board faced during its first year was a proposal by Chancellor J. Michael Mullen to reallocate debt service payments each college and university in West Virginia makes to pay off a 20-year bond issued in 1992. Had this occurred, Marshall stood to lose \$20 million over 10 years.

Under Gary's leadership, the Board and numerous other people convinced Chancellor Mullen to drop the proposal.

Glenn White is hardly surprised by Gary's ability to have a major impact on major issues, no matter whether they're family related, Marshall related or business related. "Gary is one of the most outstanding young men we have in West Virginia," White says of his son. "He's industrious, he's a motivator and he's one of the best negotiators around." If Gary has a fault, it might be that at times he over-schedules himself in an effort to please others. He needs about 30 hours a day to fit everything in.

"People are continually calling him to solve their problems," Harless says. "That takes away a lot of his time at home. Sometimes (his talent) can be a liability. The question is, should he be doing as much as he does? Of course, that's his decision."

Gary's dad agrees.

"He has a tendency to make appointments that sometimes overrun each other," Glenn White says. "It's a good thing he has a helicopter. He has such a tight schedule."

Fortunately, Gary's wife of 32 years understands, accepts and supports his hectic lifestyle. Like Gary, Jo Ann has many strong qualities.

"She's a very talented gal," Gary says. "She's athletic and one of these people who can do almost anything. If she walks into a crowd of people, she will be in a conversation very quickly. If she's in a gathering and children are in that group, they will naturally gravitate to her."

The two met in high school when they sang in the county-wide youth choir. They dated occasionally at first, then steadily their senior year in high school. They were married in 1970 when both were attending Marshall.

There was little doubt that Gary was mature beyond his years at that time. "We never had any trouble out of Gary whatsoever," Glenn White says. "I don't know if I've ever had to correct him—maybe once. He skipped his teenage years, he was always so far ahead. The things that the kid would do were amazing. He was a joy to be around. Today, he's well respected by his peers, he lives a wholesome life and he's achieved great success. And I don't know of a better father. Their daughter is really blessed."

Gary says he never questioned God about Jennifer's condition. He and Jo Ann only know they love their daughter dearly and are thankful for each day they can spend with her.

"God has so wonderfully blessed them," Glenn White says of Gary, Jo Ann and Jennifer. Glenn White likes to call his life and his ministry a journey—"a good journey so far," he says.

It's been a good journey, too, for Gary White, from his teenage days of mowing lawns and washing cars to his current 10 years at the helm of the highly successful International Industries.

And, his legacy is still growing. Remember that Dairy Queen in Logan?

It's still standing!

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