

WEST

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RANDOM THOUGHTS

A Community Conversation

This week, *West Newsmagazine* talks with Bret Heinrich, president and CEO of Wings of Hope, a Chesterfield-based nonprofit that provides global aviation programs, including U.S. medical transport, to help communities around the world become self-sufficient with programs in education, economics and food security. In 2016, Heinrich became the nonprofit's first top executive to hold the title of CEO as well as president.

What is special about the place in which you grew up?

I grew up in Dwight, Illinois. My graduating class has 69 students in it, so we quite literally grew up together. Everyone knew each other, and the bonds that we had remain special to this day. I would do anything for my classmates and for my hometown to this day. We maintain close contact. It was, and is, a small town literally surrounded by corn fields. It was our little corner of paradise.

What invention doesn't get a lot of love, but has greatly improved the world?

The rubber band. The rubber band is not appreciated as it should be. I use rubber bands for so many different things. I use them to close up bags of chips that aren't fully eaten, and rubber bands can be used to repair things. It's a very simple device. The easy answer is air conditioning, but that gets a lot of love.

What were some of the major turning points in your life?

When I was considering where to go to college, I was all set to go study forestry at a major public university and, at the last minute, I decided that I wanted to play college football at a small school in central Illinois named Eureka College.

It was there that I met my wife, and that was a major turning point in my life ... I didn't really know who she was, but I just felt compelled to meet someone named Anne Shaw. I don't know if God was whispering in my ear to seek this woman out, but I found her, and that has been a major [turning] point in my life.

I would say also that, as I was leaving school, I applied for a fellowship to go teach in Japan. I was a David Murray Fellow and that experience changed my life because it took me from there to being offered a job years later by the president of the college I taught at, who was starting a nonprofit orga-



Pilot Rick Bergman with Payton and [at right] Wings of Hope President/CEO Bret Heinrich. [Wings of Hope/Carol Enright photo]

nization. That's how I got pulled into the nonprofit sector. The world of philanthropy, fundraising and making a difference by serving a mission, all of that was opened up to me just based on a decision to apply for a fellowship to go teach in Japan.

And, of course, the birth of my three beautiful children. When you become a parent, that becomes a turning point in your life, and nothing is ever the same after that.

What do you wish you knew more about?

I wish I knew more about math as my kids were growing up. With each new grade, my wife and I would look at each other and say, "OK, this is third-grade math. Is this the last year we'll be able to help our kids?" or "OK, this is fourth-grade math. Will this be the last year that we can help our kids?"

Do you think humans will ever be able to live together in harmony?

You know, that's a great question. I oftentimes think that the things that are our greatest strengths are also the things that divide us the most. I would place the unique, wonderful diversity of people in this world as something that is incredibly beautiful, and ironically, it's also very divisive. ... I personally have a strong Christian faith, and that's important to me. I think if people are able to connect across their diversity, across faiths, across all the things that tend to divide us but still make us unique and who we are, we have a great opportunity to live in harmony. One of the great equalizers is education. I really believe if we can help bring others to their full potential through education, then there is a shot at living in harmony.

Now, as a Cubs fan living in St. Louis, I don't think there will ever be true harmony in this universe.

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This client moved to Ladue with furniture we recently purchased for her Chesterfield home. The goal was to design an updated, traditional living room, incorporating outdoor elements and comfortable seating for entertaining. The challenge was to create a new look while using existing furnishings. Because of the size of the room, a new rug was chosen which determined the lovely, soft blue-green walls and set off a favorite painting. A touch of grasscloth wallcovering adds texture and contrast to the back of the shelving. Softly lit by a repurposed pendant, two new chairs complete the conversation area while, on the opposite end, existing furnishings form a comfy nook. New window treatments, shutters and accessories completed the space and met the goal.

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