

Tom Gale

Senior Advisor at NAI Greywolf
Member since December 2006



Everyone knows Tom Gale. More importantly, Tom Gale knows himself.

A man of faith-inspired giving, Tom tirelessly applies his love of city and fellow humans through ubiquitous service, purposeful networking and 60-hour work weeks. Tom not only wears his heart on his sleeve, he rolls up his sleeves to serve what's in his heart.

"I am a networking guy and I love it," said Tom, explaining the frequent "Gale sightings" in the city, sometimes with a teen he knew 23 years ago in the YMCA, who now is mayor. "I also have a knack for getting close to the flame."

That means doing the heavy lifting needed to make a difference in the city and in individuals' lives. Example include co-founding Jazz in the Park 28 years ago at a time when "a lot of people were afraid to go downtown."

It also includes stepping in to take care of a vulnerable teenage boy and his little sister after they were "off loaded" by their parents.

"When I found out, I said that's a kid I have to know," Tom said. "Those kids needed to know what a real family could be."

Tom and his wife Sharon set new places at the table and time in their schedule to chart loving paths for these kids they met by chance to give them a second chance in life. They also adopted two young children with broken lives to add to their two children.

"I live by the philosophy: To whom much is given, much is required," said Tom, who is guided by a Catholic faith that expects followers to use their gifts, talents and abilities generously.

Tom's roots in Washington Heights were nourished at St. Sebastian Catholic Church and School. He recalls taking the bus as a 7-year-old anywhere in the city without fear. "I still recall the awe of Gimbels and the thrill of watching the WRIT radio DJ spin records at downtown events."

Tom serves on the Board of Sharp Literacy and The Lutheran Foundation. Other civic engagement has included serving on the boards of Sojourner Family Peace Center, South Shore Yacht Club, Downtown Branch YMCA, and Housing With Help; co-founder of Live at the Lakefront; president of the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center; fundraising advisor for the Milwaukee Women's Center; founding member and president of the Modjeska Children's Theater Company; president of the East Town Association; and Bastille Days and Blue Jazz BBQ festival operations official.

In his professional life, Tom, vice president of NAI Greywolf Commercial Real Estate, has racked up 2.5



million square feet of properties sold or leased in the last 10 years alone. His emphasis is downtown Milwaukee, but he's reached beyond.

Despite his signature conspicuous sports coats (he claims to have only six), Tom cites subtlety as one of his special business skills in facilitating sensitive real estate transactions, sometimes involving acquiring numerous parcels for big developments. These deals require integrity, tact and wariness.

Paradoxically, anonymity—or a desire for it—was Tom's albatross. Shedding that hindrance is a story he eagerly shares to give people confidence.

"People think I was always outgoing. Not true. I was gripped with fear."

At the University of Wisconsin–Platteville, Tom wanted to be in sales and knew he needed a confident voice. He decided to conquer his fear by auditioning at a local radio station. "I stood outside the door and left after 10 minutes. Stage fright," he explained.

Determined, he took a broadcasting course and then got a weekend DJ gig at WDBQ in Dubuque, Iowa, with the stage name of Dick Shane. Next was a stint as a TV announcer in Florida while in the Navy. Back in Milwaukee, he joined theater groups and dived into roles like emcee at Live at the Lakefront.

A Rotarian for 18 years, Tom said it took nearly five years before he got past "the nervousness of being in such an intimidating room." He clearly overcame his shyness. He has a notable Rotary presence including his Tuesday invocations, aided by 35 years of reading scripture at Mass, most recently at Holy Apostles Church in New Berlin.

"I try to tell a story," Tom said of his spiritual messaging.

Most would agree it's often a good story. Just like Tom's life.



Editor's Note: *Rotary People of Action* is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Jeff Smoller.