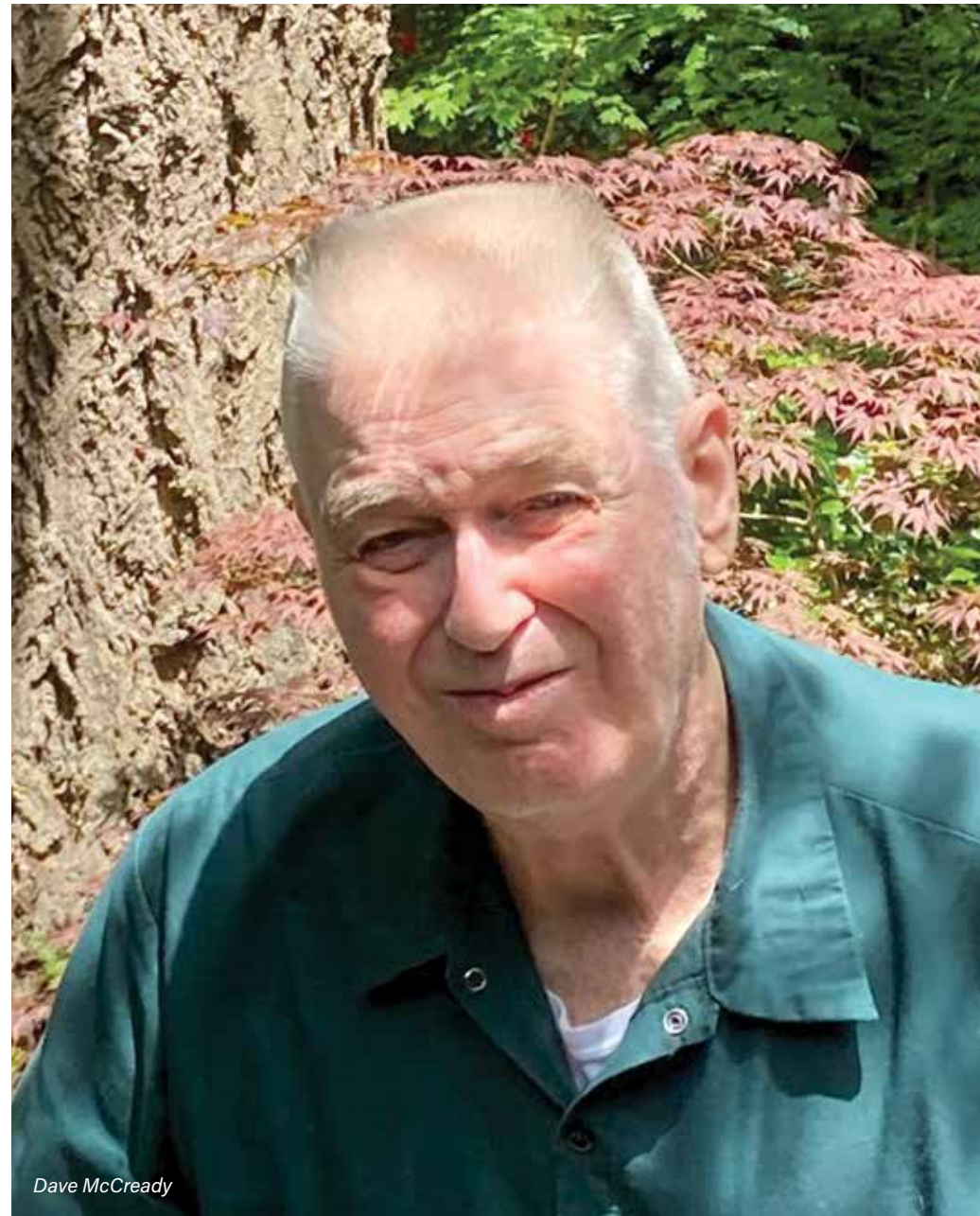


# MY MENTOR, DAVE

By John Milliken

I well remember when I first met Dave. Unbeknownst to either of us at the time, our meeting would evolve into a 25+ year relationship of great importance, particularly for me. Leslie and I had just moved to Oregon in October 1988 when Delta had opened its Portland base as the hub for its Asian routes. I had just checked out as an L-1011 pilot, Leslie flew as a flight attendant and we had just purchased a lakeside home on Lake Oswego, a beautiful community just ten miles south of Portland.

As part of our move, I brought my 1939 Cadillac 61 Series convertible sedan, which I restored four years earlier, along with my newly completed restoration, a 1948 Packard Station Sedan (Woodie). Aside from a few Delta friends who also made the transfer to PDX, we did not know many locals, so I decided to become acquainted with my favorite group of people, car collectors. I first joined the Packards International local region, followed by the local region of the Cadillac-LaSalle Club. Other than a brief membership sometime during the 1970s, I was not a member of the CCCA. I heard the Oregon Region was a very active group so I joined the CCCA and Oregon Region,



Dave McCready

ultimately becoming its Director for two terms.

A month after settling in the Portland area, I attended the Oregon Region of Packards International's annual dinner. I decided to drive my freshly restored 1948 Packard Woodie, to the delight of all who attended, except a guy named Dave. He thought I had erred in painting the median strip on my front and rear bumpers. I quickly produced a factory photo and sales brochure showing the body color paint on bumpers was correct. I went home that evening and told Leslie that I very much enjoyed the meeting, with the possible exception of one guy named Dave.

I have always been a "hands on" restorer and owned many cars that were just drivers that became collectible in later years. I even put myself through college flipping cars that I could buy using my father's dealers license at the Sacramento Auto Auctions, fixing and detailing them as necessary, then selling at small profit.

So now I was a member of the CCCA and while I had two lovely restored vintage cars, they were not Classics, and I wanted a Classic. In 1992, a local vintage car dealer had just acquired a 1939 Cadillac Series 75 Fleetwood Convertible Coupe from a museum in Victoria, British Columbia that had gone out of business. I bought the car, and since



1939 Cadillac 75 Fleetwood Convertible Coupe

it was in need of a total restoration, I needed some advice about local resources who could be trusted to do the upholstery, paint, body and mechanical work required.

I had changed my initial thoughts about Dave as I got to know him. He had restored cars for several of my friends locally and did a very nice job on them. At another car club dinner shortly after I purchased the Cadillac, I sat next to Dave and, knowing I liked to be actively involved in my restorations, he asked if I would work with him on the restoration. I relished the idea and we were soon to spend another year and a half actively restoring the car. We debuted the car at the Cadillac Experience at the CCCA Museum on the Gilmore campus in Hickory Corners, Michigan in 1994 where it won a blue ribbon. We were invited to the Meadow Brook Concours d'Elegance for another blue ribbon, then participated in Michigan Region's Grand Classic where the car received 100 points plus a special award given by the local Region. It also won the Pre-War Best of Show that year at the national Cadillac-LaSalle meet in Seattle. We exhibited it at Pebble Beach that year, as well.

A few words about Dave: To begin with, he always stood out in a crowd, as he was a giant of a man, at 6'6" and had a commanding voice. He was a bit of an oddball, the type where folks would say "he is one of a kind" or "they threw away the mold after Dave." He had a few idiosyncrasies. You always knew

exactly where you stood with Dave and he was always forthright in his opinions. It helped if you were a Republican. Working with him you would be expected to enjoy Rush Limbaugh on the radio, or Portland's own version of Rush. Yes, in the 1990s, progressive Portland actually had a Rush facsimile.

Despite his height, he had a deathly fear of heights, which I learned after we checked into a hotel following the CCCA Museum show. The hotel only had an outside elevator and in our travel to the 6th floor, Dave turned white as a ghost, holding on ever so tightly to my shoulders. I even had to enter his room ahead of him to close the drapes. Dave grew up the son of a lumber magnate who owned a chain of several lumber stores in Oregon. Dave however, preferred to drive the lumber trucks and restore cars to working in the office of the family business. After marrying Jeannette in 1962 he built a lovely home in the farm country of Hillsboro, about 25 miles southwest of Portland, including several outbuildings to store and restore cars, plus a paint booth and sandblast pit.

Dave always wore a green uniform outfit, similar to those worn back in the day by Texaco gas station workers. I very seldom saw him in any other attire. He was a creature of habit, eating every morning promptly at 6:30 at the nearby McDonalds. He was diagnosed with stage 1 diabetes in 1983 and impressed his physician with his ability to manage the

disease while incorporating a six-pack of Bud Lite into his routine after work each evening. He was very honest and efficient at his work and even rigged a clock to a light bulb and switch to monitor his work hours. Each time he was not working for his client, such as answering the phone, he would turn off the light/clock.

Dave got the old car love from his father and inherited several cars. But his true love was Packard and he owned a number of nice Packards that he restored for himself. Our relationship did not end with completion of the 1939 Cadillac. I restored about six more cars with Dave over the next 20 years, even after I moved to Southern California and after my retirement from Delta in 2004. These included a 1934 Packard 1101 convertible sedan (now owned by Gary Severns), 1938 and 1941 Cadillac convertibles and a 1940 Buick 80 Limited convertible sedan (now owned by Gary Carr). We were nearly complete on my 1939 Buick Roadmaster Convertible Sedan in 2014 when Dave finally said that due to health issues, he could not assist anymore. However, we kept in touch via email and phone until his death this past March.

I flew to Portland for Dave's funeral service on April 9th. He died March 28th at age 83. I was honored to drive Dave's cremated remains from his home in Hillsboro, Oregon, in his all-time favorite Packard, a 1941 180 Touring Sedan, to his final resting place in the family plot in Forest Grove, which was also the town where we participated in the many Forest Grove Concours events during our years in Portland.

Dave was my mentor and friend. I am sure many of you have had a special friend who inspired and helped you in your own projects, whether they were cars or something else. Dave McCready was preceded in death by his wonderful wife, Jeannette, who died in 2015. He is survived by his daughter, Karla, who was his caretaker in his last year, her husband, Matt, Dave's son, Mike, who is among the most knowledgeable mechanics I have ever met. All my restored cars went through his capable hands before hitting the road. He is also survived by his two grandsons, Mike's kids, Nathan and Cameron. Adios, my friend.

If you have a mentor, or copartner in your restoration, tell us about it. Those memories are worth sharing. ●