

**James Lehr Kennedy
Entrepreneur, Economist,
Innovator, Education
Class of 1966**



When Jim Kennedy read about the inventor of "the jaws of life," the rescue device for people trapped in wrecked vehicles, he decided he wanted to make a living doing something to help people. After years of learning and with a lot of work experience and personal drive, Jim reached his goal. The learning began in Needham, where Jim and his older brother grew up.

At Needham High, Jim made the honor roll and received an honorable mention in the science fair. His memberships in the Audio Visual Club and the Computer Club signaled his mechanical and electronic proclivities, while his presidency of the Methodist Youth Fellowship indicated his leadership potential.

Describing life at NHS in the mid-sixties as the last of the "happy days," Jim remembers: "The war in Vietnam was not a concern yet. 'Ballad of the Green Beret' was the number one song in 1966. Drugs were not a problem. Our concerns were limited to Saturday night dates, tests, term papers, and choosing a college."

Jim affirms that he "learned a love of learning and specifically a love of science and economics at NHS" and, from many of his teachers, intellectual honesty. Memorable teachers were Mr. Taylor (science), Mr. Preston (algebra), Mr. Dodge (7th grade algebra), and Mr. Brock (geometry and computer).

With a solid high school education propelling him, he matriculated at the College of Wooster, majored in economics and minored in computer science, and graduated in 1970 with a BA degree. After earning an MA in economics and an MBA at The Ohio State University, he continued to take courses there

in industrial and systems engineering.

While still in graduate school, Jim began his professional life, which may be thought of as three overlapping careers: First, his twenty-one year tenure with the State of Ohio in energy forecasting, energy facility licensing, and utility regulation; second, his twelve years of teaching economics at night to an aggregation of 6,000 Ohio State students; and, third, the creation and management of his own business.

While employed by the state, Jim developed seminal techniques and computer models for forecasting energy consumption, a major result of which was the cancellation of plans for seven nuclear plants and three coal plants, saving the citizens of Ohio and Pennsylvania between \$8 and \$10 billion dollars.

In 1989, Jim developed an innovative system called High Volume Call Answering (HVCA), on the basis of which he later formed his own company, Twenty First Century Communications. His business provides call-overflow services to electric and gas utilities by sensing when a utility would return a busy signal due to heavy call traffic during an outage, and rerouting the call to voice computer equipment, thus allowing callers to report outages. The system then reports the outage information electronically to the utility and provides callers with an estimate of restoration time. The company, with Jim as CEO, now employs more than 40 people, boasts annual revenues of \$15 million, and fulfills Jim's dream of helping people.

Joining his entrepreneurship to his interest in creative arts five years ago, and again helping people, Jim co-founded the Glass Axis Studio, the Midwest's only not-for-profit public-access art glass studio, where artisans may develop their techniques and styles while learning administrative skills. After interning with Glass Axis, nearly a dozen glass artists have gone on to establish their own studios or national reputations in glass art. In 1997, the Columbus [Ohio] Chamber of Commerce named James Lehr Kennedy "Innovator of the Year."

An accomplished glass artist himself, Jim has exhibited work in several galleries. But, he mainly gains satisfaction from helping others, whether consumers with energy outages, promising artists, or circumscribed people. He served as a trustee of Buskers of Columbus, a nonprofit organization that provides entertainment to shut-ins, nursing home patients, and prisoners.

C. W. O.