

# LifeStyles

SECTION C • THE DILLSBURG BANNER • FEBRUARY 14, 2013

Northern High School Alumni

## Where Are They Now?

Mike Harpster - GM's Director of Global Research



By Steven M. Nesbit  
Feature Writer/Dillsburg Banner

Before I had a chance to say hello Mike said, "I have a very bad memory. I really can't remember things that far back. To be honest, I got C's and D's in high school, but at college I did phenomenally well."

These were the first comments Mike said to me as we sat down at a table at Ferrante's Pizzeria for our afternoon chat. By the end of our talk, my brain kept playing over and over again the fifty year old theme song of the classic cartoon series produced by Hanna-Barbera in 1962 called, The Jetsons. So, "...Meet, George Jetson..."

Michael O. Harpster was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania on September 24, 1969.

When he was three or four years old his family moved to Mechanicsburg while they were building a house in Dillsburg. As long as Mike can remember, he has always lived in Dillsburg. His parents, Michael Sr. and his mother Rhonda have five children. Michael Jr. is the oldest, his sister Holly is a year younger, his brother Nathan is six years younger and then there are Kristen and Amy.

When Mike was growing up, the family visited his grandparents quite often. "I remember my grandfather, who was in his 70s, spending a lot of time with me," said Mike. "My mother is one of twelve children and my grandfather had lots of grandchildren, but he always found time to make me feel special. I remember him taking me fishing and to the gun club more times than I can count." Mike went to Northern Elementary and remembers playing flag football in the field in front of the school and playing kickball on the playground.

Mike was very interested in cars at a really young age. "My dad had a 1971 Corvette. I remem-

ber sitting in the car looking at all the gauges and trying to figure out how everything worked." The headlights flipped up and down, so Mike would flip one up and one would be down and that would get him in trouble. "I was about 8 years old when my dad could tell that I was playing with the instrument panel," he said.

When Mike was twelve his dad started a family business. "When I look back at my life, it has always been about cars," he said. His father had a car lot and a garage. Every day when he came home from school, he would go to the car lot and wash and wax cars. It was a great experience for Mike. "There were a lot of great cars coming out during the late 60s and 1970s. I started working as a mechanic as I got older. When I was fourteen, I replaced an engine in a car for the very first time. I remember that because it took me all day to complete, more than eight hours," Mike said proudly.

In high school, Harpster enjoyed physics, art, and music. Mike was a percussionist. He played the bass drum in the band until the end of his sophomore year. "The bass drum sounded like a good idea until you have to march in a parade," he said smiling. By then, he had a drum set. A few guys from high school put a band together and played for about a year. "Then that was it; the end of my music career," laughed Mike. He was a stage crew member. "I really didn't go out for the stage crew. My friend signed me up, but it was a blast! I got to operate the dry ice machine in Brigadoon," he said.

As Mike got older, he started working in the garage on cars; however, he remembered, "When I was 16 or 17, I got kicked out of my dad's business because I borrowed his Corvette without asking him, and he did not appre-



### Playing 20 Questions with Mike Harpster - Class of '88

Yesterday's family: *Living in Dillsburg.*

Mikes parents: *Mike Harpster Sr. and Rhonda*

Mike's siblings: *Holly, Nathan, Amy, Kristen*

Today's family: *Living in Michigan. Mike married Jody Sypniewski in 1994. They have one son, Ethan, born December 25, 2001.*

1. What is the best advice you ever received? **Don't invest in depreciating assets.**
2. A favorite childhood memory? **Biking and fishing with Gary LeMasters.**
3. A family tradition? **My son and I go out for donuts on Saturdays. We take the Corvette and drive around a little by going to a different donut shop.**
4. Any pet peeves? **People talking on cell phones at inappropriate times.**
5. Your guilty pleasure? **Ice Cream.**
6. If you could spend one day with anybody who would it be? **A historical, political figure like Washington or one of the Founding fathers. To hear their ideas about how to go about starting a new nation.**

See *Playing 20 Questions. 5C*

ciate that."

After high school graduation, Michael went to college at Penn State York and majored in engineering science. "I really thrived in college after barely graduating from high school," shared Mike. "We all learn in different ways," explains Harpster, "If a teacher is lecturing, like in high school, my mind wanders; however, give me a book; let me read it, and I'll understand it. It's much better learning style for me."

Mike's first semester at Penn State York, he received all C's. His second semester he earned all B's. During the second semester of his sophomore year, he had a physics class. The average of the class was about 50%, but Mike was getting 100% on his tests. And from that point on, he received straight A's. "I learned how to study. If I can see equations in my head, and if I can run a program in my head, I understand it forever," he revealed.

After Penn State York, Mike transferred to Penn State main campus and participated in Penn State's Cooperative education program where he had a semester of classes then worked as an engineer at Cummins Diesel Company for a semester which continued into the summers of both his junior and senior year.

When Mike graduated with a bachelor's degree in engineering science from Penn State in 1992, he was offered a fellowship at the University of Wisconsin and a research assistantship in their engine research center. "I liked the University of Wisconsin, but Jody, my girlfriend at the time and now my wife, was offered a job in Harrisburg, so after my first semester at Wisconsin, I transferred back to Penn State, and I was given a research assistantship at Penn State."

His research focused on gasoline engines at

Penn State and was funded by Texaco. "It was a good move for me because I always wanted to work on automotive engines and especially wanted to work for General Motors. When I graduated with my Master's in Mechanical Engineering in 1994, I had multiple offers from GM and Cummins.

Mike started in GM's advanced engine engineering group in 1994. "I started as a combustion engineer," he continues, "Every summer I was sent to Arizona when the temperature was 110 degrees for testing. In the winter, we were sent to Ontario when the temperature was a minus 20-30 degrees. We did all kinds of testing. We actually drove up Pikes Peak. It was funny; we had to watch a video called, Don't Scare the Tourists. I did that hands-on type of experience for two years."

So, General Motors would announce they wanted to design a car. The expert group would ask: How do we take that idea and turn it into a car? "It's a fascinating process to watch," Mike explains. "There's a lot of people in the room. It's a fascinating group to be part of. I was the engine transmission guy. In that room, there's experts, like a chassis guy, a suspension systems guy, and a body structure guy and so on. We start with a high level idea of what we want to

See *Where are they now. 5C*



## The Miracle of Music

Curt Werner  
Staff Reporter/Dillsburg Banner

Valentine's Day is just around the corner, which means romance is in the air for kids and seniors alike. Dillsburg's Elmcroft had a Sweetheart Dance on Wednesday, Feb. 6. Hearts were hung from the ceiling, tables were neatly decorated and a long table

against the wall had a wide range of desserts lined up. The entertainment was by Jazz Me Band, led by Kirk Wise.

One week ago, Cindy Middleton, who lives in Michigan and is on temporary leave from the U.S. Air Force, received a phone call from Elmcroft advising her if she wanted to visit her mother, 92-year-old Helen Middleton,

now was the time, as Helen's health was fading.

Helen had a wonderful talented life. She loved to paint and music was a big part of her life—especially honky tonk. Throughout her years living in Sumnerdale, Helen had three sons and two daughters. Music was always in the house, something through which the whole family could bond. They even

formed a group called the Middleton Family Singers and, in 1969, made an appearance on the "Ted Mack Show."

Kirk Wise grew up near the Middleton household and became friends with Helen's sons, Charlie and Stan, while attending East Pennsboro High School with them.

"I owe that family a lot, teaching me to love music," said Wise. "Their house was the meeting place and everyone hung out singing, playing instruments and taking piano lessons ... Mrs. Middleton took us under her wing."

On the day of the Sweetheart Dance at Elmcroft, Helen didn't have any energy and didn't want to go to the dance. So when Kirk arrived at Elmcroft with his musical group, the Jazz Me Band, and he learned Helen was a resident, he visited her and Cindy.

"What are you doing here?" asked Helen.

Cindy told her mother that Kirk would be playing with his band at the dance.

"I have to get dressed," said Helen. "I want to go to the dance."



Photos by Curt Werner/Dillsburg Banner

### Helen Middleton, Kirk Wise and Cindy Middleton.

The Sweetheart Dance was going in full swing. Harold and Marzella Wolf, of York Springs, were seated at a table. The couple has been married for nearly 70 years.

"I could not have ever found a better wife," said Harold. "I am not much of a dancer."

Helen arrived at the dance with her daughter pushing her wheelchair. Her eyes gleamed as they listened to the band, her foot moving along to the beat.

"Do you want to sing?" Cindy asked her mother. Helen nodded yes, so

Cindy pushed the wheelchair to the left of the band and the microphone was lowered inches from Helen's lips.

No one knew what was going to happen. The band started to play. Despite the sound of the band, there was a quietness in the room. At first, Helen's words were too faint to hear. Then her sweet song got stronger. "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, / That saved a wretch like me. / I once was lost but now am

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Helen Middleton sings "Amazing Grace" with the Jazz Me Band, led by Kirk Wise, at the Valentine's Day dance at Dillsburg's Elmcroft on Wednesday, Feb. 6.

## Where are they now?

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do. We lay out the pieces and eventually the small group advances to the vehicle development center. Usually, there's an idea guy, and then the small group breaks down the ideas."

Mike worked on the hybrid architecture about eight years ago. "I was fortunate to be able to be in the room where the most brilliant people in the world were seated. It was outstanding. I love the idea of going into fertile ground and doing things that people have never been done before. We ended up being pretty prolific. The four of us patented the Chevy Volt. That's what's really excit-

ing. I mean, it's life-changing. In hybrid space, we question everything."

Harpster explained that engines were first made a hundred years ago which was a good thing, but he bad thing is that engines have not been improved since they were first designed a hundred years ago. Back then, people made decisions about engines and since that time, (Mike called it the "why fix it if it ain't broken" mentality?), there's been no changes.

"When I was working in hybrid space, everything was new. It's refreshing; however, for some reason, we never questioned the engine before. How could the engine be good if two thirds of the fuel in every car that's on the road today is being wasted?" He explained that one third of the fuel goes into the

coolant, and one third goes out the exhaust. "So, we have to look at it as if it's broken. Now the question then becomes: How do we fix it?"

He asks, "What would those people from the 1920s do if they were around today? If they were beginning to design an engine today and had never seen the cars of today, would we be doing things differently?" Mike Harpster wants to do his part. "My goal is not to see what's the highest level I can achieve at GM. I've been working there for eighteen years, and it's more exciting to me now than when I first began."

During his career he's had five or six different jobs. Every two to three years he gets a new job. He has worked on engines and transmissions, and he's actually worked three years on the planning phase of the business side of operations; and he was the assistant chief engineer in charge of taking their project to production. "I went from being in charge of a small group to being in charge at the next level. So basically, I went from being in the idea group to the production group. Since I knew the math, I moved to the head of the production group. You get to be the boss when you know more about the product than the people who work for you."

Mike recently went back to research. Why? "Because when you're ready to turn the crank, you really don't want to be changing ideas. It's like eating your own soup," he said. "I do miss working with the people directly. These are some of the best minds in the entire world."

So, it's back to the future for Mike after visiting his family and hometown recently. "I currently have my dream job as the director of propulsion systems research at General Motors. I am responsible for leading all research and development globally for conventional and electrified propulsion systems. In simpler terms, I am in charge of all the research at GM on engines, transmissions, highbred systems, electric motors, and power electronics. I can't talk much about what we're working on, but I'm really looking forward to seeing the execution of the great technologies we are developing for future cars. I see GM changing the automotive landscape. My personal focus is to continue reducing emissions and greenhouse gases and figuring out how to make our planet a better place."

## Playing 20 Questions Continued from 1C

7. What was one of your proudest accomplishments? **Leading the team that invented the drive system for the Chevrolet Volt. I was awarded GM's Boss Kettering Award - GM's highest technical award.**
8. What type of music do you enjoy? **I'm always changing. Currently listening to John Cougar Melloncamp and Pink.**
9. What TV shows did you watch as a kid? **Happy Days.**
10. What your idea of relaxation? **Being at the beach.**
11. A favorite quote? **"I'm only concerned about the future because I'm going to spend the rest of my life in it." - Boss Kettering**
12. Three words that describe you? **Dedicated, hardworking, honest.**
13. Something that's always in your refrigerator? **Parmesan cheese and pickled eggs. I eat them for breakfast.**
14. Who'd you like to be stuck in an elevator with? **An elevator repair man or Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton (as a pair).**
15. Hop on a time machine, where would you go? **I would go forward in time: At least 100 years in the future because you can see what your grandchildren will be living through, and unfortunately, you can see the consequences of what's taking place today.**
16. What's your favorite aroma other than petroleum? **<no answer>**
17. What is your idea of exercise? **I ride an exercise bike 3 days a week and lift weights at the gym.**
18. What makes you angry? **People that are more interested in themselves than the job that they do, or people motivated what by what's in it for him - you know, improving their situation.**
19. What talent would you like to have? **I'd like to be able to read music.**
20. How would you like to be remembered? **As a good husband and father, and also for putting great propulsion systems into production at GM.**

## Mastering Gardening

Continued from page 2C.

variety that you simply can't discourage. Will grow in soil or water, any location or any temperature." What's not to love about a plant that adaptable?

If this plant has one failing it is the tendency to lose lower leaves as it grows taller. When the leaves merely brown at the tip, you can simply snip off the end of the leaf to mimic the natural angle of the leaf. When the entire leaf yellows, remove it.

Should the plant look un-gainly with too much stem exposed, simply cut off the stem several inches below the foliage and re-root in water, then repot. The dracaena looks particularly nice with two or three plants of varying height in one large pot, that way a bare stem does not draw as much attention to itself.

My final recommendation is a recent acquisition, a plant which I haven't grown before, but which seems to be adapting nice-

ly to the dim conditions in our dining room: a peace lily, *spathiphyllum*. The peace lily likes shade, deep to partial, and dislikes direct sun. It requires rich, moist soil and likes more regular watering. I've read that if you see the peace lily's leaves wilting, you know it is time to water. A plant that reminds me to water it may fit in well with my low-maintenance protocol. Time will, of course tell, if it's "indestructible."

You can contact Margaret with thoughts or comments at [Margarite@dillsburgbanner.net](mailto:Margarite@dillsburgbanner.net).

## Seasonal Seasonings

Steven M. Nesbit  
Staff Reporter/Dillsburg Banner



## What Does Love Got To Do With It?

In 1964, Murray Schisgal scored a Broadway hit with his farce called LUV. I directed that comedy years later. I loved it. In an interview, Schisgal was asked why he spelled the title L-U-V which may be the first time that spelling was ever used. He replied, "The emotion of love has been perverted and misused to such an extent that it can only be defined by using another word." He answered, "L-u-v is the perversion of l-o-v-e."

The use of the word love has spiraled out of control, and Schisgal recognized that almost fifty years ago. We love french fries; we love purple; we love movies; we love the Ravens; we love school; we love horror movies; we love texting, and on and on and on.

It's ironic that Schisgal's definition of love used in the play is the best concrete definition of an abstract word I've ever heard. People say "love" can't be defined. What do you think of this definition? "Love is a gradual development based on physical attraction, complimentary careers, and simple social similarities." I love it.

According to my communications textbook by DeVito (2011), there are six types of love, but first: below is a short true-false test that may answer "What Kind of Lover Are You?" Do you believe the statement to be a generally accurate representation of your attitudes about love or not?

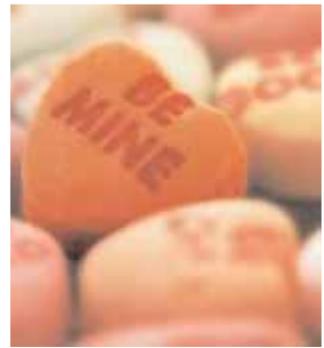


1. My lover and I have the right physical "chemistry" between us.
2. My lover and I really understand each other.
3. When my lover gets too dependent on me, I want to back off a little.
4. I believe what my lover doesn't know about me won't hurt him/her.
5. I expect to always be friends with my lover.
6. Our love is a really deep friendship, not a mysterious, mystical emotion.
7. An important factor in choosing my lover was whether he/she would be a good parent.
8. Choosing my lover, I believed it was best to love someone with a similar background.
9. When my lover doesn't pay attention to me, I feel sick all over.
10. I can't relax if I suspect that my lover is with someone else.
11. I would suffer myself rather than let my lover suffer.
12. When my lover gets mad at me, I still love him/her fully and unconditionally.

How'd you do? This scale by Hendrick and Hendrick (1990), is based on the work by Lee (1976). This scale is designed to enable you to identify your own beliefs about love. The statements

above relate to the six types of love. Here they are:

**Eros** love seeks beauty and sensuality and focuses on physical attractiveness, sometimes to the exclusion of qualities that others might consider more important. The erotic lover often feels unfulfilled.



**Ludic** love seeks entertainment and excitement and sees love as fun, a game. When the partner is no longer interesting enough, it's time to change.

**Storge** love is a peaceful and tranquil love. It's a gradual process of unfolding thoughts and feelings and is sometimes difficult to distinguish from friendship.

**Pragma** love is practical and traditional and seeks compatibility and a relationship in which important needs and desires will be satisfied. The pragma lover relies not so much on feelings as on logic.

**Manic** love is an obsessive love that needs to give and receive attention and affection. When an expression of increased commitment is not returned, reactions such as depression, jealousy, and self-doubt can lead to extreme lows.

**Agapic** love is compassionate and selfless. Jesus, Buddha, and Gandhi practiced and preached this unqualified love--a love that is offered without concern for personal reward or gain and without any expectation that love will be reciprocated.

So, if you look back at the 12 true-false statements, the first two are characteristic of eros love; the next two of ludic love and so forth. Like friendships, romantic partners come in different styles as well.

Valentine's Day on Thursday means it's a Valentine's Day weekend. Seize the opportunity. I hope each and every one of you can take a few minutes out of your busy lifestyle to show and tell the people that you really care about how important they are in your life. Last year, I suggested giving the big three: a thoughtful card, a nice traditional gift like flowers or candy, and an intimate dinner at the appropriate restaurant. And a bonus, don't forget the "something special". It doesn't have to be expensive, it just has to be from the heart. This is the perfect time for you to practice random acts of kindness. Honored poet, Nikki Giovanni reminds us that "We love because it's the only true adventure."

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