

WELCOME TO BENZIE COUNTY CENTRAL SCHOOLS FEATURED FRIDAY ALUMNI. Today we would like to recognize, Class of 1992 alumni, Michael Bair.

Michael lived in Benzie County his entire childhood, attending Crystal Lake Elementary and then Benzie High School as part of the class of '92. He was lucky enough to have a friend recruit him for Saturday football in 5th grade; he had teachers who pushed him ahead in math; and he had parents who thought his love of Legos would mean he'd like engineering. They were right! BCHS offered so much – Mr. John Gehring's biology, especially those weekend trainings they did with recombinant DNA technology, were unheard of at the time in high schools, and Mr. Will Lynch's Calculus and Physics, well, Michael feels he really couldn't have been better trained for those AP tests and jumping off to college. He states, "I owe an incredible debt of gratitude to my teachers (not to mention the administrators). How did they put up with us? I remember during the 'great days in physics' competitions, my team's goal was to either win or cause as much chaos as possible – or, if possible, do both. So many great memories – friends, sports, student council, NHS, Key Club."

By the time Michael left Benzie, he felt like he had been taught to think for myself and to speak up. When he interviewed for NAVY ROTC, after a group interview with 5 other candidates, the recruiter pulled him aside and said the entire interview had been about assessing leadership. They gave him a scholarship, and he received one from the Air Force as well, but in the end he didn't take either thinking (hoping?) that maybe he could pay for college on my own.

He went to the University of Michigan for Electrical Engineering. When he left Benzie, he had no idea if he was a liberal or conservative or really what any of that meant. During orientation he remembers being in an exercise with other students when they were asked questions such as "if you went to a party where you didn't know anyone and everyone there was a different color/race, would you be 'comfortable' or 'uncomfortable', and vote by where you stand in the room". And there he was, the only person who was close to the 'uncomfortable' wall when every other student was crammed as close to the comfortable wall as they could get, and the leaders were looking at him like he was crazy. They asked him why he would be uncomfortable and he looked at all those other students and said "you go to a party where you know nobody at all and you are perfectly comfortable?" It was an early example of splitting from the group and questioning consensus that has since served him well in his life and career.

Those first college calculus, physics, chemistry, and biology classes were hard, and yet Michael remembers thinking that he had been pretty well prepared for it. And all those study sessions he had in high school made the transition to group projects in engineering much easier than it could have been. There were times when he didn't think he'd make it, like when he had to take a second job during his sophomore year because he simply didn't have the money to eat (so he worked at a campus restaurant... problem solved!). Then there were times, like taking his first computer engineering class, when a bell went off in his head and he realized 'this is what I was meant to do'. That's a great feeling.

In his 3rd year he was interviewing for an internship with Nortel in Raleigh, NC, with about 100 other students vying for 30-40 jobs. He remembers getting so tired near the end of the day that his outspokenness showed through again. Talking to an interviewer that he particularly liked, he pointed around to the other students interviewing elsewhere around the room and said "look, I don't know most of what you are talking about, but the truth is, neither do the rest of these guys either regardless of how they try to impress you. I guarantee you though I can learn faster than they can". Michael got that job and spent 8 months down there working on speech-activated dialing. The job was a blast, North Carolina was a blast. Good times.

Later in college he interned with Motorola in Phoenix, AZ. Again, the city was awesome, the job was fun, but mainly he learned something new about himself: He loved the outdoors –hiking in the desert, mountain climbing, etc. Funny that he had to go 2000 miles away to learn that!

Michael graduated Summa Cum Laude in Electrical Engineering, and was all set to go get a master's degree when he made a completely random and life changing decision. He had interviewed with a number of companies – tech was hiring like crazy then – so he got to fly all over the country to visit them. He wasn't really interested in taking an immediate job, but he did want to find out about them and see how he could do. But one of them stuck in his head – an interview with a team in Oregon that worked for Intel. They were building CPUs, and in fact were the team that had just put out the 'Pentium Pro', the big microprocessor on the market back then. There was something about the team, and something about the setting of Portland – big city sitting right by the mountains, thick with forests, and near the ocean, that had him hooked. Michael decided to drop getting the master's degree and dive in to work. He didn't realize it until later, but his start time couldn't have been more perfect – He got in on the early days of a big new project and was able to make a name for himself early on. The project resulted in the Pentium 4.

He also spent those first few years hiking and climbing mountains in the Northwest, Alaska, Patagonia, and New Zealand. He got to see a lot of good territory, but as much as he loved it, he had to ease back on the heavy climbing due to consistently getting bad elevation sickness. The stuff he saw though... geez. A storm coming off Denali and pummeling them in their camp on Muldrow Glacier in Alaska. Standing on the edge of the southern ice cap in Patagonia as the wind picked up stones off the nearby ground and hurled them at them. Helping a couple hikers who got hurt in Argentina hike out of the wilderness after a bad storm, and almost losing them in a river crossing that went bad. Diving into a glacial lake. Those things stick with him!

Michael met Sue briefly at U of M and then they re-met in Oregon. Their first date was a friend's party, their second date was a week-long hiking trip in Glacier MT with a bunch of friends. They got married in '99 back in Ann Arbor. They bought a fixer-upper on 6 acres out in the foothills of Oregon's coastal mountains and spent years and years rebuilding it. Come to think of it, he says....we still are! They have 4 kids now: Sabina (13), Max (10), Nate (8), and Alistair (5). Michael love teaching them – Sue and Michael joke that sometimes she's the bad cop and he's the mean cop, and sometimes their roles reverse... but there is never a 'good' cop!

He's done a bit of volunteering in the community including a 15-year stint helping young children to read as part of Oregon's SMART program. Sue helps run the soccer program in their town and he has coached youth soccer and baseball, which is pretty funny since he says he knew exactly zero about either. At work, alongside his day job of developing microprocessors, he teaches leadership classes and mentor engineers around the globe. Along with all of that, he still gets to play ice hockey weekly, a passion of his for years and years. Michael says, "I have a lot to be thankful for."

Michel looks back fondly at his time in high school. A piece of advice Michael would like to share, is this.."Most of the important decisions that will have the biggest effect on your life are made while you are ages 13-17 – you make a lot of choices about your priorities, where you are going to put effort, what type of friends you want to have, and how you are going to conduct your life. Do whatever you can to keep as many doors open as possible!"

Michael extends his heartfelt thanks to the BC schools staff, then and now!

Wow, wow, wow Michael...we are in fact #OneBENZIE proud. Thank you for sharing your amazing journey thus. Best wishes to you and your family, always. Yep, you guessed it. Mrs. Crossman says, like, love and share this!

