

# JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

Quick, Timely Reads  
On the Waterfront

**Jack Veiga: Bay Rat Success Story**

**By David Frew  
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*Dr. Jack Veiga, distinguished Bay Rat alumnus*

The phone rang a few days ago and an old friend, Jack Veiga, was on the other end. Jack grew up in the neighborhood (on Cranberry Street), went to St. Andrew

School, and accompanied me on a long and circuitous professional road that included jobs and academia. We were classmates, sharing undergraduate and graduate classes at Gannon. Later we worked together as engineers, and then we went off to Doctoral School at Kent State University, where we spent three years as graduate school colleagues before going our separate ways. While I moved back to Erie to teach at Gannon University, Jack went “big time.” The academic job market was red hot in those days and Jack took a position at Northeastern University in Boston. We spoke regularly during his first year as a professor and when he expressed frustration with his position, I urged him to consider coming to Gannon. We could have used him. He was an immensely talented classroom teacher and researcher.

Jack had other ideas. He moved to the University of Connecticut in 1972, several years before that school had reached the national prominence that it has enjoyed lately. At the risk of lavishing undue praise upon collegiate athletics, it seemed from a distance that Connecticut sprung into prominence at about the same time that its men’s basketball team became a powerhouse, winning the NCAA Division I national championship. Suddenly, everything seemed to be growing and improving at Connecticut, including the academics, which had always been of high quality. Interestingly, the amazing success of the basketball team seemed to have a positive impact on the endowment, a reality that has been noted by several leading academic institutions.

Jack and I spoke regularly for several years and presented papers together at national conferences. It was wonderful to see his career flourish and to watch as his list of quality publications expanded geometrically. He was happily working at a “publish or perish school” and publishing both books and refereed articles in journals. Jack’s strategic management books were groundbreaking, and I used them as textbooks at Gannon.

As time marched on, I watched Jack’s amazing career, chatting with him from time to time and then for some reason we stopped chatting. I later learned that he had retired. He continued to have a campus presence at UConn as a distinguished professor, but he was no longer an active part of the campus. I made a mental note at the time that another Bay Rat alumnus had done quite well and found myself remembering the Portuguese kid who had been such a force in the neighborhood.

Jack’s claim to fame as a neighborhood kid was that his dad owned the gas station at West Fourth and Chestnut streets. Us car-crazy kids envied Jack’s connection to the service station. He started working there as a very young boy and while we sometimes wondered if he wasn’t there too much, our concerns could not match the envy that we had for his proximity to cars. As we got older and even more car-crazy, lusting after the way-cool automobiles of the 1950s, Jack was regularly working on and with them. If he had a special Bay Rat brand during those days, it

was “gearhead.” Jack understood cars and engines. Even as a very young boy he knew how to service, repair, and improve any vehicle.

The 1950s gas stations were very different from today’s major retail fill-up places. Instead of the few massive convenience store complexes that dominate the business these days, feature 20 or more pumps, and serve soft drinks and snacks, there were many more small stations. The relatively simple mechanical features of 1950s cars enabled small station owners to provide competent repair services. Jack’s dad’s station had an inside bay and lift. Cars could be moved indoors and worked-on with the distinct advantage of great tools and work lights. It was called “Bud’s Friendly Service” and offered credit for regular customers quite like many of the neighborhood grocery stores at the time. The Bayfront neighborhood was populated by these small service stations with the closest competitor in the neighborhood located at West Fifth and Cherry streets: Bross Atlantic. Another station was at West Sixth and Cranberry streets and several others on West Eighth Street.

By the time he was 14, Jack Veiga was regularly taking engines apart and putting them back together. At age 15 he had his own car. He could not (legally) drive it, but he was tweaking away, making it really cool, and preparing for his 16th birthday. Jack was the envy of every car-loving kid on the bayfront. The culmination of Jack’s artistry and skill was a beautifully sculpted, customized Chevrolet, which had been denuded of every factory ornament. The hood and trunk were “plain,” which was the customizing trend back then. Unlike the rest of us who removed hood ornaments and then did a less-than-professional job of filling the holes, Jack’s work was flawless. I can still imagine that car after Jack rolled it into the gas station one weekend, meticulously removed all of the old paint, and primed the body after sculpting beautiful custom taillights and other body details. The very trendy color that he used for the final paint job was Sierra Gold. Wow!



*Jack Veiga’s dad stands in front of his gas station at the corner of*

*Fourth and Chestnut streets.*

Custom cars were all the rage in those days and Waldameer's Rainbow Gardens featured several car shows each year. We always went and toured the rows of amazing automobiles. During that wonderful period, the best of the custom cars were painted Sierra gold, a brilliant brown-gold color that screamed "customized." It was not a typical production color



*A customized 1949 Mercury decked out in Sierra gold*

While lots of kids my age might have parlayed Jack Veiga's skills and experience into an automotive career, and there were lots of opportunities, he had other ideas. He went to Gannon, became an engineer, and then enjoyed a long and productive academic career, eventually retiring as a distinguished professor. As of 2023, it had been decades since Jack had been back to Erie and it was wonderful to see him again. We had lunch at Oliver's Rooftop Restaurant, overlooking Presque Isle Bay and he was stunned by the view. Modern Erie is almost unrecognizable to someone who has been away for so long. He had just toured the bayfront, including our old neighborhood, St. Andrew Church, and the former location of his father's gas station. While some parts of the old neighborhood looked almost the same as they did when we were kids, there have been wholesale changes. The site of his dad's service station is now the parking lot for the Martin Luther King Center, and St. Andrew School is no longer in operation. Jack could not get over the development near the Public Dock, now Dobbins Landing. New hotels, restaurants, a convention center, tour boats, and other changes have made Erie into a beautiful destination.

It was wonderful to see my old friend. I hope he does not wait so long to come back the next time.

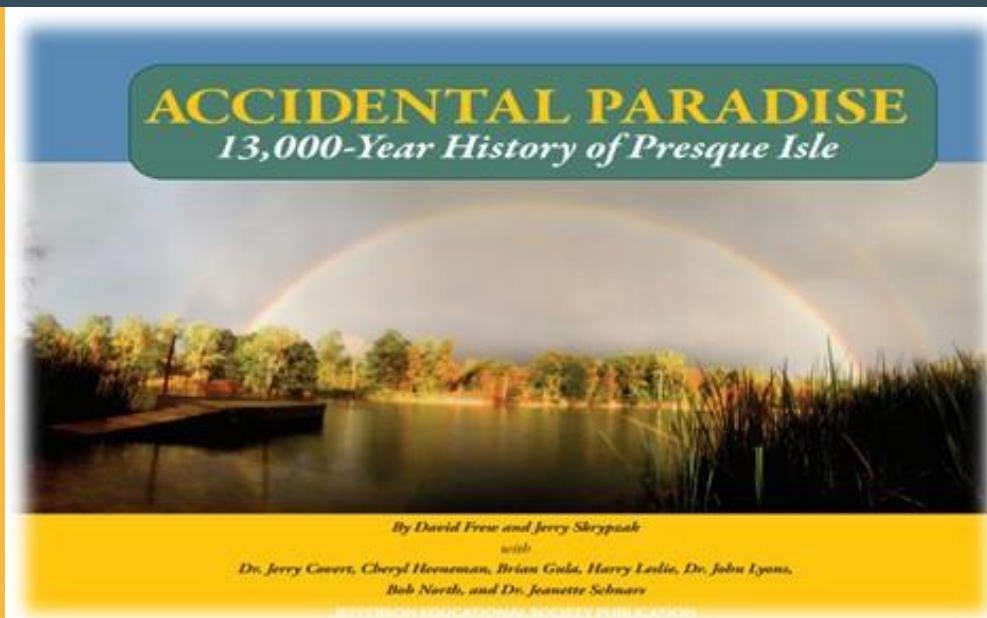
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To watch "Accidental Paradise: Stories Behind The Stories" click [here](#).

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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