

Clay High School Distinguished Hall of Fame Nominee

ROB WESTRICK ('85)

In 30+ years he has accomplished much professionally rising to the very top of his field, served his community and been an inspiration to many. He is a loving husband to his wife Stephanie, a devoted father to his eight children, and a friend to many. He has lived filled with adventure, authored and published several books, lectured in other countries and so much more. All the while never letting the success go to his head, and still returns to Oregon, Ohio as often as possible to visit family and friends.

Rob always wanted to be a marine archaeologist. Rob went to Owens Technical College. There he earned a degree in Business Management, something "safe" and practical. Afterwards he graduated from the University of Toledo, where he majored in Business Administration and Minored in History.

After graduating from UT he had a good job working as a book keeper doing accounting work, but he still longed for adventure. In 1995, something happened that would change his path in life. His sister Lorie was killed in a car accident. He came to the stark realization that there are no guarantees in life and life is too short to not be doing something you truly love. He decided to become a marine archaeologist. There were only two schools in the country that offered an advanced degree in marine archaeology, Texas A&M and East Carolina University. The secretary where he worked just happened to have a sister who lived in Greenville, NC, where ECU is located. Two schools in the country, he worked with less than a dozen co-workers and one of those co-workers just happened to have a sister who lived in Greenville, North Carolina. Not one to believe in coincidences, Rob felt it was destiny.

He applied to graduate school and was accepted into their Maritime History & Nautical Archaeology program. During his time in graduate school he got to dive and explore many shipwrecks, not only in the USA, but around the world. He did his thesis on a Civil War shipwreck named the USS Peterhoff. The Peterhoff was actually the very first shipwreck ever to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Despite that distinction, no archaeological survey had ever been conducted on the site. Rob obtained permits from the State of North Carolina, the National Park Service and the United States Navy to conduct such a survey and the results of that survey were included in his master's thesis.

He graduated with honors and has been working in the field ever since. In 2008 Rob was hired by a company called C&C Technologies, Inc. one of the world's leading marine survey companies. The company discovered the U-166, the only German U-Boat lost in the Gulf of Mexico. Different searchers had been looking for the elusive U-Boat for nearly 60 years. The company found it during a routine gas pipeline survey. Rob served as the lead archaeologist on a shipwreck they discovered called the "7,000-Foot Wreck." At the time it was the deepest historic shipwreck ever discovered in the Gulf of Mexico. The company also put together a

survey plan for an expedition to the Titanic in 2012, to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the sinking. There are probably less than 200 professional marine archaeologists in the world, and of those only a very few specialize in deep-water exploration. Rob is one of maybe a dozen, and certainly no more than 20 people in the world, with the qualifications and experience to work in that field. He is a registered professional marine archaeologist and has been the lead author on over 350 scientific reports submitted to various government agencies.

Rob also continues to do shallow water work as a hobby. He is the project archaeologist for 1715 Fleet - Queens Jewels, LLC. The 1715 Fleet disaster was one of the deadliest and most impactful events in maritime history. In 2015, Rob was onboard the salvage vessel when the group recovered 351 gold coins on the actual 300th Anniversary of the sinking. The find included eleven rare coins known as "Royals", perfectly round coins made specifically for the King of Spain as presentation pieces to demonstrate the quality of the coins being produced at the colonial mints. Prior to this discovery there were only a handful of such coins known to be in existence. The amazing find was valued at 4.5 million.

In conclusion, Rob has risen to the very pinnacle of his chosen profession. He has worked on some of the most important shipwrecks in the world, including Blackbeard's Queen Anne's Revenge, the U-166, the Titanic, the 1715 Fleet, and a dozen different World War II shipwrecks and many others. He has been the guest speaker at numerous events at museums, historical societies, Rotary clubs, etc. He has presented at conferences around the world. He has authored a dozen books on the subject and published hundreds of articles. He has received recognition and awards for his professional work.

Personally, he has been married to his wife Stephanie since 2005. In 2018, they had a daughter Madison who was born with Down Syndrome. She was also born with a heart defect and at 6-months old required open heart surgery. Sadly just 9 days later, a cold landed Maddie back in the hospital and that cold turned into pneumonia and she passed away on October 27, 2018.

While tragic, and still very much in the mourning process, Rob and Stephanie got involved with a non-profit organization called "Maddie's Footprints" They are now mentors, continuing to share their story and help other couples who have experienced the loss of an infant death, whether it be through miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant death. They have helped and inspired many families in their community through this outreach work.

He has been actively involved in Boy Scouts of America, the Down Syndrome Association of Louisiana, the Knights of Columbus, their church and coaching. Rob's volunteer coaching goes back to his days in graduate school. While in graduate school he was a substitute teacher and began coaching girl's softball (and volleyball). He always coached with the philosophy that you weren't just teaching kids a sport, you were teaching life-long lessons that would lead to success in life, well past the court or diamond. Today, more than twenty years later, many of these young girls that he coached still reach out to him and thank him for the lessons and impact he has had on their lives.

After serving as the head softball and volleyball coach at Trinity Christian School in North Carolina, he moved to Arizona and was the head coach for several years at Apache Junction

High School. He had some great teams then, but one of the more unusual things he did there was teach a young 16-year-old girl to drive. Her father and a brother had died in a car accident several years earlier and her mother was scared to death to teach her daughter to drive. She asked Coach Rob if he would mind teaching her daughter to drive. Always trying to help others, Rob did exactly that, and not only taught this young girl to drive, and get her license, he also helped her find a used car. He taught her how to check the oil and change a tire. Both the mom and daughter still keep in touch with him to this day.

Rob has continued coaching, now his own sons and daughters. He has coached at Evangeline Little League (ELL) for the past nine years. He almost took a year off coaching the year he daughter died, feeling he didn't want to do something he couldn't put his whole heart into. He felt the kids deserved better. It was members of the Evangeline Little League Board of Directors that approached him and urged him to reconsider. One even suggested it might aid in the grieving process to "get back to normal" doing something he obviously enjoyed and was good at. He did, and that team was very successful. So successful that the board asked him to coach the All-Star team in the Little League tournament, where they again experienced success.