

TODAY



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- Community News That Matters Nationwide • Award-Winning
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- Covering the Heart of the Farmington Valley and Beyond

Bruce William Deckert

Editor-in-Chief

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Radio Drumbeat – WIHS prez is connected to CT's State Heroine



From Paradiddles to President: The Journey of Drew Crandall

Editor's Note:

—This first-person account by Drew Crandall is the third feature in a *Today Magazine* series connected to WIHS 104.9 FM, Connecticut's oldest Christian radio station — Drew is the WIHS board president

—Drew Crandall's life-and-family history intersects with fascinating and compelling aspects of the history of Connecticut and the Farmington Valley, a five-town region just west of Hartford, the state capital

—He is a relative of Prudence Crandall, the trailblazing Connecticut teacher and Quaker abolitionist who was imprisoned in 1834 for simply opening a school and educating black girls in Canterbury CT — Prudence is in the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame and the National Women's History Museum — the Prudence Crandall Museum in Canterbury is a stop on the Connecticut Freedom Trail, and the Connecticut General Assembly has named her the official State Heroine

—Drew is an 11th-generation direct descendant of Rev. John Crandall, one of the founding settlers of Westerly, Rhode Island — John Crandall is a great-great-grandfather of Prudence Crandall — Prudence is a great-great-great-great-great aunt of Drew Crandall

—By the way, if you're wondering about the definition of "paradiddle" from the above headline — a paradiddle is a drum-stroke pattern alternating left-hand and right-hand strokes — Drew says he was probably best-known as Drew the Drummer during his teenage years — he was the featured drummer for the Simsbury High School jazz band

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By Drew Crandall
Special to *TODAY Magazine*

My first exposure to Connecticut's Farmington Valley was during the summer of 1967 at 11 years old. My father, Robert Crandall, was working for Great American Insurance Company in New York City and our family was living in Somerset, New Jersey, a suburb of New Brunswick. My mother Jeanne worked at Rutgers University in the Nuclear Physics Laboratory office.

Dad was being transferred to Hartford — the Insurance Capital of the World — where Great American had offices in what is now called the Gengras Medical Clinic at the corner of Asylum Avenue and Woodland Street.

Mom and I drove around the Hartford area for several days to explore various towns and homes for sale. This was long before GPS and the internet. I was Mom's navigator, sitting in the front passenger seat reading maps, taking notes and sharing observations. The two finalists in our search were the towns of Wethersfield and Simsbury.

We were very close to putting an offer on an existing English Tudor home in Wethersfield when Mom discovered a new development in the Weatogue section of Simsbury being developed by the LaCava Construction Company of Wethersfield.



Drew Crandall served in the First Company Governor's Foot Guard from 1980-86 — the Foot Guard is the nation's oldest continuously serving military unit, now ceremonial, per CT.gov

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My parents were convinced that both towns offered good quality of life and good schools. Both towns were "west of the river" — which was important for avoiding rush-hour traffic across the Connecticut River.

At the time, Wethersfield's population was about 25,000 and Simsbury's about 15,000. Wethersfield would have been an easier commute, a simple and straight eight-mile drive with no natural obstacles. By contrast, the commute from Simsbury was only two miles longer, but would require Dad to commute over Talcott Mountain — a very unpleasant experience in the winter!

You could buy more house for your dollar in Simsbury, so we met with the LaCava sales agent and visited a one-acre wooded parcel on Red Stone Drive. I still have a brochure on this development in a souvenir box. You could select from a ranch, raised ranch or colonial. My parents decided to go with the colonial, named The Aldrich. The new construction price in 1967 was \$29,900 — today, the house is worth about \$540,000.

Being new construction, there was an obvious lag time before we could move in. Dad had to begin his new job in Hartford right away, and my parents wanted to enroll us in the Simsbury Public Schools as soon as possible, so the six of us — my parents, brother Derrick and twin sisters Debbie and Donna — lived in the Granby Motel on Route 10 for several months while our house in Weatogue was under construction.

Mom was our shuttle bus, taking me to Henry James Memorial Junior High School and my siblings to the brand-new Simsbury High School. She also landed a part-time job at Simsbury Bank & Trust headquarters.

Regarding my siblings: Derrick is the oldest (Simsbury High class of 1969), Debbie and Donna were born just minutes apart in that sequence (1971) and I'm the baby brother (1973).

In late 1967, we moved into our new home on Red Stone Drive. I vividly remember the big Mayflower tractor-trailer moving van getting stuck in the mud and snow trying to back up the hill to our house.

As we settled into Simsbury, we spent Sunday mornings at First Church of Christ on Hopmeadow Street. For all of us kids, getting involved in school music was instrumental in acclimating to our new environment. Derrick played trombone, Debbie played French horn, and Donna played the flute and sousaphone. I played drums in the concert band, jazz band and marching band — and I remember marching in Simsbury's Tricentennial Parade in 1970.

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My siblings Derrick and Donna were far more interested in and intellectually equipped for academics than I was. I was a decent student but found myself more interested in other things.

I became involved in Boy Scout Troop 174, which met at Troop Hall adjacent to First Church of Christ. We did quite a bit of hiking and camping at the McLean Game Refuge, and I went to summer camp at Lake of Isles in North Stonington. Later, when the McLean Home was under construction in Simsbury, I was a member of the Boy Scout Explorer Post that helped develop the landscaping and hiking trails there.

For quite a few years, I also played snare drum in the Lake Garda Fife & Drum Corps based in Burlington. I loved to hike up Talcott Mountain, swim at Stratton Brook State Park, and ride my bicycle everywhere! The Farmington Valley was my playground.

In 1972, I obtained my driver's license and landed my first official part-time job at the grand opening of the new Stop & Shop at the Farmington Valley Mall — collecting carriages, bagging groceries and stocking shelves. Since then the mall has been demolished and replaced by Simsbury Commons, the commercial plaza on Bushy Hill Road, also known as Route 167.

When I wasn't at school, doing homework or working, I loved to throw my canoe on the roof of my used 1964 Rambler station wagon and paddle on the Farmington River and at Barkhamsted Reservoir.

After graduating from Simsbury High in 1973, I spent four years at UConn on the Storrs campus, graduating in 1977 with a B.A. in sociology and a minor in economics. From there, my 49-plus year career in sales, marketing, media and communications began with stints in Washington D.C. and Chicago before I returned to my native Connecticut.

I've spent most of my adult life living in a cozy log home (in true Boy Scout fashion) in the hilly, rocky woods of Ellington with my wife Dawn. Career-wise, I operate KEEP IN TOUCH, a marketing and media business based in Vernon that I founded on July 1, 1988. I still play drums regularly!

While I no longer live in the Farmington Valley, I stay connected to the region. Once in a while, I drive by my old house on Red Stone Drive, speak at the Simsbury Public Library Business & Career Center, and hike up Talcott Mountain. I also visit Valley Community Baptist Church in Avon for special events. Whenever I return to the Valley, I look back on my six years of living in Simsbury very fondly.

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My intersection with WIHS 104.9 FM began in 1989, four years after my faith in Christ came alive at a Christian business breakfast in East Windsor.

For decades, I've been very active in local churches and various Christian ministries. My relationship with the station gradually grew to the point where I was invited to serve on the Connecticut Radio Fellowship board of directors in 2017, enlisted to use my communication skills to help with station rebranding and communications. The fellowship is the nonprofit that owns and operates WIHS Radio. I was voted president in 2020, so I'm currently in my seventh year serving in this volunteer capacity.

Leading a media ministry that provides 24/7 hope and encouragement to people of all ages and walks of life, in Connecticut and beyond, is a huge blessing. I encourage Today Magazine readers to tune in on-the-air and online. You can start by visiting www.WIHSradio.org — Jesus saves! God bless you today and always.



Drew Crandall has been playing the drums throughout his life

**This is the third story in a three-part *Today Magazine* series
on WIHS and the Connecticut radio realm**

TODAY publisher and editor-in-chief Bruce Deckert is a multi-award-winning journalist who believes all people merit awards when we leverage our various God-given gifts for good. He has previously worked in the communication realm at ESPN Digital Media, the Journal Register Company and The Master's School.

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