

**GERRY CONWAY – CHAPLAIN, CAPTAIN, CORVETTE LOVER: AN INTERVIEW
WITH ONE OF RCC’S LONGEST-SERVING MEMBERS**



Gerry was born in Westfield, MA, and grew up on Long Island. As a young boy, he loved playing baseball and later while in high school he excelled in basketball. He graduated from West Hempstead High School in 1964. Gerry’s dad Ralph was a Captain with American Airlines, so Gerry enjoyed free family flying to all sorts of places. His dad was also a strict military man, which is where Gerry (according to his partner, Sharon Morse) got his “buttoned down, by the book personality.” Gerry attended Notre Dame from 1964-1968, where his major was Government; during that time he was in folk groups as well as a renowned Glee Club that was featured on the Andy Williams television show and other such programs. Also during that time he was accepted into the University of Arizona Law School and formed a small folk band, playing guitar and 5-string banjo.

A Love of Corvettes

Always believing Corvettes to be “a work of art,” Gerry bought a blue 1977 model in 1988 while living in South Bend. In 1991 he received an offer to come work at the Reno VA; he soon realized, however, that the Corvette was too small for his needs, so it was sold here in 1992. Soon after, however, opting again to stay in the C3 family, in 1996 he purchased a Classic White 1976 Corvette (which he kept until 1999) and joined RCC. In 1998 he obtained a Bright Red 1992 convertible. Shortly after, in 1999, he purchased a 1965 Nassau Blue roadster (owned until 2023). Then, in 2005 he bought a 50th Anniversary (2003) Anniversary Red version, and his final Corvette was acquired was a Blade Silver 2017, which he sold this year. For many years, more than one Corvette resided in Gerry’s garages, and while sporting his 1965 roadster he was heavily involved both as a member and Club volunteer for Hot August Nights activities.

As mentioned, Gerry joined the RCC in November 1996; he was the last elected Vice President of the Club (Ray Rich was President) and was on the

Hospitality Committee (a primary responsibility of which was sending birthday cards to members). There weren't many members (author's note: RCC minutes show that in November 1996 there were 77 total members, and about 25 attended meetings; see more information at end), but it was an active club. Gerry remembers meeting at Heritage Bank on Virginia St. (Bob Martucci, member, worked there), as well as the top floor of the old Ramada Inn, at Champion Chevrolet, and in restaurant side rooms. At times, California clubs would come here to join RCC in events, meeting at the Peppermill and Atlantis. Interestingly, one activity was a timed road racing event south of Virginia City; one California member flipped and totaled his Corvette.

At one point, RCC member Terry McCreary wanted to get married, so they made an agenda item for that to happen at a meeting; Gerry used a Corvette owner's manual as his "Bible," and performed the ceremony (and for comic relief, at one point he inserted "Do you take Julie to be your automatic transmission?").

During the course of selling his 1965 Corvette in 2022 after 23 years of ownership, he went to the DMV for a VIN check; he was told that the VIN on the car was for a 1971 Chevelle Malibu! Fortunately, in the end he learned that another VIN was located on a frame rail; so after several weeks, the DMV issued a "bonded" title and the car was sold.

Military Service

Gerry's military service spanned different branches and several points in time. First, from October 1968 to April 1970 (see Viet Nam service, below) and then in the U.S. Army Reserves from 1980-1996; then, in 1996, he transferred to the Air Force Reserves because local Army units were closing down; he served there from 1996 to 2003, at which time he reached his 20 years and separated from service.

Gerry served in Army Infantry in Viet Nam for 368 days, in the jungle on patrols as well as in helicopters as part of the 9th Cavalry Regiment, which won dozens of citations and today has the reputation as one of the finest combat units to serve there. During Gerry's tour in Vietnam, while there were no "typical" days, he was surely given one of the most dangerous assignments in country. He was assigned to a helicopter assault group, with the straightforward mission of locating the enemy. On such days, he and his unit would be flown by helicopter ("helo") to some location, exit the helo, and then venture into the jungle. Sometimes they made contact with and exchanged fire with the enemy, and then they would be brought back to base. On the days they did not have a helicopter mission, they had

to remain on alert in the event they were called to provide security for air crashes – a not at all pleasant duty. At night, they manned a 10-foot-high guard tower with a .30 cal. machine gun (and his own M16 rifle) with triggers at the ready for their claymore mines that were in place. Later, having earned his Combat Infantry Badge by virtue of his combat experience, Gerry was transferred to HQ (Headquarters), which afforded a far less stressful existence.

CIB



Cavalry Patch

Chaplaincy Career

Gerry entered the Army Chaplaincy program in 1980 while in the Reserves in South Bend; he graduated from the program with a Master's of Divinity degree in 1982 conferred by the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Having served in the war, he knew firsthand the need and desire of military personnel for the guidance and counsel of chaplains. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant while in the seminary. Due to having experienced combat in Vietnam and earning the CIB (which he wore on his uniform), he was approached by that National Chaplaincy Director while attending an annual Army Chaplain's meeting in Washington, DC. The Director had noticed and been impressed with Gerry's CIB and mentioned that very few chaplains had seen combat and earned the badge; he asked if Gerry would like to become a VA Chaplain, to which Gerry's response was an enthusiastic "Yes!" His first assignment was in 1989, in Battle Creek, Michigan. Two years later he would be offered and accept the position as Chief of Chaplaincy at the VA Hospital in Reno.

At the Reno VA, Gerry's workday began at 0730, when he received a list of current and newly admitted patients. His first stop was always at the Intensive Care Unit, and then he began ward visitations at about 0900, after breakfast time. He typically entered the hospital rooms and introduced himself and just chatted; he wouldn't bring up spiritual matters unless the veteran initiated the topic. Several years later, an accreditation organization required him to do a Spiritual Assessment for each veteran and document it in the patient's chart – not a pleasant task, but Gerry would use that function as an opportunity to ease into a deeper conversation, where meaningful discussions often took place. In the course of the day, he would visit all the wards, including Mental Health and Nursing Home. He

often received beeps on his pager, summoning him to particular rooms. This type of schedule was maintained from Monday until 1400 on Friday (always being weary when going home at night); then, on Sunday, he returned to the VA hospital for worship services.

Gerry served in this capacity in Reno for 20 years (retiring in 2011), where he would supervise other chaplains (and serve as its only full-time chaplain). In addition to health and spiritual matters, he often visited with veterans about cars and Corvettes. Traveling once in his Corvette to Beale Air Force Base in Marysville, California, he recalls that people there were amazed to see a chaplain rolling up in “America’s Sports Car.”

Sharon’s story:

Even though she never owned one, Sharon Morse had always loved classic hot rods. She had first met Gerry in 2010 while they were working at Reno’s VA Hospital; they later reconnected in 2014 when Sharon returned to the VA as an ambassador volunteer at the hospital – and happened to notice a “cute chaplain” at the ambassador podium. They became a couple in 2015, and the rest is history - she joined the Club and, as she puts it, has been riding on his coattails ever since.

Sharon has never driven a Corvette but has ridden in many and just loves the feel of a top-down cruise. In a perfect world, she would own a 1968-72 Corvette – automatic transmission, and green!! She and Gerry have gone on numerous in-state and a few out-of-state runs, have made many new friends and helped out at events; she recently served as Club secretary for four years.

While Sharon can’t predict how much longer the two of them will be able to participate in Club activities, she hopes that new people with fresh ideas will keep the Club going and will be an inclusive and diverse group.

First Valentine’s Dance, Feb. 2015



Ft. Bragg, Oct. 2023



Other soirees...and rolling stock:



our update to News Feed



When Gerry Conway joined the Club in November 1996:

- That meeting's sign-in sheet listed 17 members in attendance (it would increase to about 25/month after holidays); meetings began at 8 PM.
- There were 77 total members.
- President was Gary Henline; Ray Rich became President at the December meeting
- The meeting was held at Interwest Bank, but would soon move to the Gold & Silver Club
- Dues were \$40 individual, \$60 per couple
- There was \$12,377 in the Club treasury
- A "summons" sign was available for members to put on prospective members' cars