

Director of Audit and Controls Ivan Gartner: A citizen of the world

What do Germany, Japan, Taiwan, New York and Denver, Colorado all have in common?

They're all places that Ivan Gartner has lived. As a military "brat," Ivan has traveled the world, even living in the Denver area as a pre-teen.

He was even born in a foreign country. Ivan was born in Munich, Germany, which is located on the River Isar, north of the Bavarian Alps. He has an older brother, Fred.

Ivan is proud of his German heritage. His grandfather immigrated to the Baltimore area from Germany in the 1900s. His father was the first generation born in America. His father enlisted in the Army and went to Germany during World War II and then made the military his career. Ivan's mother was a war bride and married Ivan's father when he was stationed in Germany during World War II.



Just the facts

Born: Munich, Germany

Family: Wife, Carol, and son, Stefan.

Education: Attended the State University of New York (SUNY) in Potsdam, located in northern New York; majoring in business.

First job with Kevin McNicholas: selling Pepsi at the Continental Drag Raceway in Denver.



Ivan with his father in Okinawa, 1960

leather), never spoke German again and has refused to visit the country.

Ivan, on the other hand, has always kept in contact with his mother's family living in the Munich area. He said he thinks the city is beautiful and he feels very much at home in the third largest city in Germany.

On one of his trips, he attended the 1972 Summer Olympics held in Munich. He stayed with his aunt, whose apartment overlooked the Olympic Village. Unfortunately, the games were marred by an act known as the Munich massacre. On September 5, Palestinian terrorists held 11



Israeli athletes hostage in their apartment in the Olympic village for almost 18 hours. During a failed rescue attempt, all the Israeli hostages were killed by their captors and all but three of the terrorists were killed. Ivan shared it was eerie to watch what was happening on television and then step out on the balcony and see the disturbance at a distance.



Ivan has been with KM Concessions since the early days. He first started working for Kevin McNicholas at the local raceway, selling Pepsi. Ivan said Kevin was generous and gave him a 1¢ a cup; cups sold for 5 - 10¢ each. He later moved from the Denver area to New York. While in high school, he returned each summer to work for KM, even spending time at the Denver Zoo. He would stay with his brother, who also worked for KM.

After college, he returned to Denver and started working at the National Western Complex, then moved to McNichols Sports Arena. He then worked for Leisure Foods, a sister company that operated Village Inn restaurants in Longmont and Houston.

While Ivan moved frequently as a youngster, he and his family have lived in the Pittsburgh area for over 17 years. Here's an inside look at what makes Ivan unique.

What is your most valued possession?
“I don't care much about physical things. My car could crash, my house could blow up, and it wouldn't matter as those things are replaceable. However, friendship isn't. As a child, I was loner. We moved around a lot with my father's military career. I think that's why good friends are so important. My favorite holiday is Christmas because that's the time for family and friends to get together. You may not hear from friends in a while, but they pop up during the holiday season.”



Ivan with Frank Cartieri (now Director of Operations at the Pittsburgh Zoo) in 1994



Who is your hero?

“My mom. She was the most caring individual whom I ever experienced. She was a product of the war in Germany and as a result her youth was very difficult. However, she maintained family was what was important in life.”

If you could have lunch with anyone, who would it be?

“Jimmy Carter. I think it’s mostly to do with the work he’s done after he was the 39th president in 1977 – 1981. I find him really intriguing. I enjoy his outlook on life. He’s done a lot to help other people.”



In 2002, Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize for his "efforts to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development." Carter has continued his decades-long active involvement with the charity Habitat for Humanity, which builds houses for the needy.



If you’re recuperating in a hospital, whom would you want in the bed next to you?

“Assuming that we both were able to talk, again, I want another politician. Richard Nixon, the 37th president who served from 1969 to 1974. I’d really like to know what went on in the White House during that period.”

“Also, he got me out of the Vietnam War, the draft ended right before my number would have been called.”

Kenya, 1996

Tanzania, 1996

What have been the high points of the last year?

“I received an e-mail letter from a former employee. This young man was a runner at the Pittsburgh Zoo. He thanked me for everything he learned while working at the zoo. He shared that as he’s grown older and thought about what he learned, he really respected where I was coming from. For me, I have enjoyed working with the young people and imparting knowledge and good thoughts about life experiences.

Another high point has been seeing my son mature and grow. He’s also doing well in college. Recently he told us that he really appreciated us as parents and everything that we have done for him. I was 35 years old before I did that!”



What's the smartest thing that you have ever done?

“Marry Carol. No doubt. I can't imagine life without her. She completes me. If it weren't for Carol, I probably would have gotten myself into trouble.

I met Carol when she was working for Sizzler Restaurants 26 years ago. I'll never forget that when I first saw her, I knew right then and there I was going to marry her.”

The two married after a six month courtship. Ivan then returned to KM-Concessions, and they were assigned to manage Buffalo Bill's Museum and Grave, which is part of the Denver Mountain Parks system and is located in the foothills west of Denver. They were there for 10 years, and when SSA acquired the contract for the Pittsburgh Zoo in 1990, the couple moved east.

It's no surprise that a quiet evening at home sitting by the fire with Carol is how Ivan likes to spend his free time.



Ivan and Carol, 1980

What are some of your favorite things?

“I don't have a favorite food, except that I hate eating in restaurants. At one point, I was a vegetarian, but that has gone by the wayside. I have eaten some gross things, such as chocolate bumble bees in Japan, fried grasshoppers in Taiwan. There's not much out there I haven't tried.

I don't have a favorite sport as I'm not a great watcher – except for hockey. That's it for me! I actually got the bug because my son enjoyed it. It's one sport where I can follow what's going on. It has a lot of action. I get bored with baseball and football.



Also, I'm not a television watcher. I don't have a favorite program

unless CNN counts? I do have either the television on or music playing while I'm working to give me background noise.

I like the color green because it symbolizes nature and outdoors.

My favorite movie is *Papillion*, starring Steve McQueen. The 1973 movie is a true story, which depicts the numerous escapes from the notorious Devil's Island by a prisoner. After I watched that movie, I had dreams about being imprisoned myself. To me, the movie illustrated that you don't need physical freedom to be free, but emotional freedom.”



Kevin McNicholas, “Celebrity Chef” at a fund-raiser in Pittsburgh, prepares a dish while Ivan and Carol watch.



Ivan, Carol & Stefen, 1988

What talent do you wish you had?

“I wish I could play an instrument. I love music so much. It’s a great way to express myself. I took banjo lessons a few years ago, I wasn’t very good. I’d be happy to learn to play the guitar, anything like that.”

What was your favorite toy as a child?

“I had a stuffed tiger that was as big as I was. I carried that thing around for years. It was named Tony the Tiger. I just loved that thing. I think it got lost in one of our many moves when I was little. The toy still comes up in family conversations.”

What one of the craziest things that you’ve done?

“I’m one of those people who like to challenge their brains with things that are frightening. I have a terrible fear of heights, but I still ride roller coasters and other amusement park rides. Also, I used rock climb – up cliff faces more than 100 feet or so.”

Any passions in life?

“I do a lot of reading. My focus is on spiritual improvement and learning; I enjoy self-help books. My favorite book is *The Little Prince*.”

This children’s book was published in 1943. In it, the author, Saint-Exupéry, imagines himself stranded in the Sahara Desert, thousands of miles away from inhabited places, where he meets a young extra-terrestrial (though entirely human-appearing) prince. In their conversations, the author reveals his own views about the follies of mankind and the simple truths about life and love that people seem to forget as they grow older.



Ivan and Stefen with a friend, 2001