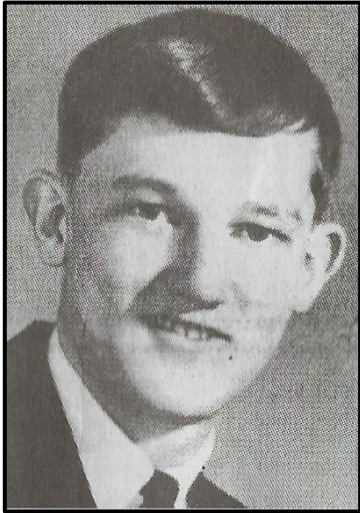


# A life of great success



**Jim Freer went from high school star to an accomplished business career on his journey to the Ephrata Hall of Fame**

**BY STEVEN SMITH  
of the Journal**

EPHRATA – There is no argument that Jim Freer was a highly successful athlete in his days at Ephrata High.

Then again, the same argument can be made about Jim Freer in the business world.

It will be the athletic success that will take center stage Sept. 27-28 when the 71-year-old Freer is enshrined as one of the first 13 members of the Ephrata High athletic Hall of Fame. After introductions at halftime of the Ellensburg at Ephrata football game on Friday (Sept. 27), the first group will be enshrined in a ceremony at the St. Rose of Lima Catholic School auditorium on Saturday.

When he got the phone call from Ephrata athletic director Bryan Johnson, who told Freer he had been selected for the inaugural class, the former Tiger great stayed humble. "It was a nice phone call."

"My son and daughter nominated me – they found out about the process and took it upon themselves," Freer said. "I knew it was out there but I didn't think I'd make it in. I did wonder if my career could make it possible."

Freer was an eight-varsity letter winner at Ephrata High, playing football, basketball and baseball for the Tigers from 1963 to 1966. His best sport was basketball, where he was a varsity team captain two years in a row – he captained the football and baseball teams for one season each.

During the time, the Tigers were champions of North Central Washington League football (which included Wenatchee, Moses Lake, Quincy and Eastmont) in the fall of 1964 and 1965, and won the NCWL boys basketball crown in the 1965-66 season. He would end his varsity hoops career having played in 43 games, scoring 536 points, an average of 12.7 points per-game.

Those numbers could have been higher had it not been for a miserable stretch for Freer in December of 1965. The Tiger senior first twisted his ankle, then had to be hospitalized with mononucleosis – it cut his last year in orange-and-black to just 10 games, but he averaged 18 ppg in those contests.

But while his moves on the basketball court made him a leader in the locker room, his mind set him apart in the classroom. Freer found himself on the school honor roll every year during his high school career – he was the ASB treasurer his last two years, a member of the National Honor Society and a member of the Wenatchee World's "Scholastic Eleven" list that honored the top scholars in the region.

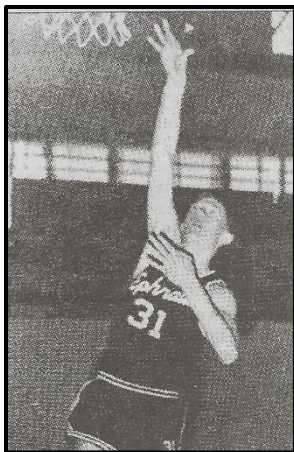
And to cap it all, he was the valedictorian for the Ephrata Class of 1966. "I wasn't just a dumb jock," he laughed.

"Ephrata was the best place to grow up. I was born in Ephrata in 1948 and went through every grade there," he said. "It allowed me to do what I wanted to do in school, to compete in sports and prepare myself for the future."

That future started at Washington State University – the Cougars recruited him out of high school to play men's basketball. He was lured to Pullman by two men who would become legends in the world of college hoops – head coach Marv Harshman, who would eventually leave WSU for a long and successful career at the University of Washington, and Judd Heathcote, who was the freshmen coach that would eventually end up at Michigan State to lead Magic Johnson and the Spartans to the 1979 NCAA national title.

"That was the highlight of my athletic career, getting the chance to play for those two great coaches," Freer said. "When they called, I was so jacked up that I went to Pullman and tried out, playing some 1-on-1 with three of their players. They saw something they liked and gave me a full ride."

But the ride ended at WSU after his freshman season. The Cougars brought in another solid recruiting class in 1967 that included Rick Erickson out of Vancouver, Wash., a 6-foot guard who would be all Pac-8 and go on to play in the NBA. "He was just a better player than I was. I knew I wouldn't have played much if I stayed, but they had a place for me to go."



That place was a little closer to home. Freer ended up playing three years for legendary NAIA coach Dean Nicholson at Central Washington State College in Ellensburg.

"I had talked to coach Nicholson during recruiting and he wanted me to come to Ellensburg then. When I left WSU, I called him and he still wanted me to play for him," Freer recalled. "I had much more fun playing at Central, and since I went from an NCAA school to the NAIA, I didn't have to sit out a year. I was able to play right away."

Unfortunately, the illness-injury bug caught up to Freer one more time in his basketball career, at the end of the 1969-70 season. Nicholson guided the Wildcats into the national title game (they lost to Kentucky State, 78-71), but health issues kept the Tiger alum out of the championship contest.

Despite that, his time in Ellensburg was still fruitful, he said. "I got a great education at Central and it got me started into my career. It was all I could ask for."

In the end, making the move to Central would prove to be more a good idea for Freer's future and less about his basketball career. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration at CWSC, which launched him into the world of finance.

And what a launching it would prove to be. Over the next few decades, Freer would go to work as a certified public accountant with the prestigious company Ernst and Young LLP – it was a landing that would change his life as he went to work for one of the largest global audit and accounting firms in the world.

From 2000 until his retirement, Freer was a member of the company's Americas Executive Board in New York, which is responsible for governance and strategy, and a member of the Americas Operations Committee. He also served as Americas vice-chair with lead responsibility for all aspects of the firm's 35,000 employees.

Freer retired in June 2008 from Ernst and Young after serving as a CPA in various positions for 38 years – he was also the lead audit partner for a publicly-traded mining company. At Ernst and Young, Freer was managing partner of the Pacific Southwest area (based in Los Angeles) from 1995 to 2000 and the Northwest area (Seattle) from 1991 to 1995.

Freer and his wife, Becky (a former Moses Lake High cheerleader) now live the life of the snowbirds – they spend summers in Bellevue, then head to Palm Desert, Calif., in the winter. The couple has two adult children and five grandchildren.

It's been a great life so far, said Freer, and being inducted into his alma mater's Hall of Fame is another special feather in his cap.

"I'm not real big on talking about myself in a positive light. In all three sports, I guess I was the best athlete on our team – well, actually, our quarterback (Steve Burck) was an absolute stud," Freer said. "I helped make us competitive against larger and more diverse opponents. I had a way with my teammates that I think made them want to play hard and be competitive."

"I loved getting coached and I loved to play the games. I look back at those days in high school and, other than some injuries and illnesses, I don't regret a thing. I put everything I had into it and reached levels that I don't think a lot of people could have reached."