

***From the  
May 2007 issue of:***

---



## **Spence Wilson, The Quiet Man**

by **Sharon B. Drechsler, RRP**  
owner/operator  
[Drechsler Communications](#)

In 1952 – during the same time period in which Family of Orange Lake Resorts COB Spence Wilson's father, Kemmons, was inventing the motel concept for Holiday Inn – John Wayne made a movie called "The Quiet Man." In it, Wayne plays a man of quiet, inner strength who overcomes obstacles to win the hand of the lovely Maureen O'Hara. Like Wayne's character that so exemplifies the high moral ideals of the '50s, Spence is a man who has managed to preserve these ideals. On March 28, 2007, this quiet man was recognized by the American Resort Development Association (ARDA) with the industry's highest emblem of honor, the ARDA Circle of Excellence (ACE) Lifetime Achievement Award.

True to form, Spence modestly declined to take credit for his many contributions, choosing rather to attribute his achievements to his father. Spence L. Wilson was a pioneer in the industry and is a person of unswerving character. Although he may be too modest to admit it, his story deserves to be told.

Spence became president of Orange Lake in the mid-1980s and Chairman of the Board ten years later. Under his guidance, Orange Lake provided the industry with the pro forma for the industry's first affordable, totally-integrated resort community – a wave-making concept at the time.

Since then, many other developers have followed his lead, incorporating his model of offering consumers a reasonably-priced vacation ownership interest in a village-like setting, composed of all the amenities and services a vacationing family might want, such as retail, restaurants and outdoor activities such as swimming and golf. Spence's vision was the grandfather of them all, as he led Orange Lake to become the largest single site resort in the world with over 100,000 members.

His plans for the future include the development of additional sites in multiple locations. Orange Lake's continued expansion will ultimately bring the total number of units to 4,500 and make Orange Lake the vacation home of almost 230,000 owners who reside in the U.S., Europe, Central and South America.

Spence has contributed selflessly and generously to the industry for the last 25 years. Here are some examples:

- On countless occasions, he provided both financial and practical support to lobbying and political efforts of ARDA at the national and state levels.
- Spence was one of the original members and supporters of ARDA's educational and research foundation when it was formed in 1982.
- It was originally known as the International Foundation for Timesharing and later renamed the International Timeshare Foundation. Each year, Spence has historically lent his aggressive and staunch support to this entity. He helped to underwrite the foundation's initial capital campaign by

donating \$250,000 and each year continues his support at the \$30,000 annual contribution level.

- Spence and Orange Lake were also one of the earliest members of ARDA-Florida, shortly after it was formed as an ARDA committee following enactment of 1983's tough timeshare amendments. In the more than 20 intervening years, Spence has continued Orange Lake's leadership position in all of ARDA-Florida's legislative, political, community relations and research activities, providing both financial and staff support year after year.

- Spence provides active support at the highest level – that of Platinum Sponsor – for ARDA's Awards Program and in the association's professional development programs, such as the Associate Resort Professional (ARP) and Registered Resort Professional (RRP) professional designations. These efforts are designed to acknowledge superior performance by individuals, teams and organizations and thereby enhance and encourage the growth of professionalism throughout the industry.

Spence Wilson's support and sponsorship of "Tennis With a Different Swing" has been fundamental to the success of this philanthropic organization. Based at Orange Lake Resort, the organization devised a rehabilitative program that uses functions from the game of tennis to teach life skills to those who are physically or mentally challenged. Among its many numerous awards, the organization was recognized by the Points of Light Foundation with an award conferred by President George Herbert Bush in 1992.

With Spence's full support, a group of researchers that included his wife, Rebecca, founded the first corporation dealing with the humane treatment of captive swans. The Regal Swan project studies and documents the care of swans in captive settings. Among its many award-winning achievements, it has been successful in finding ways to vaccinate captive swans against botulism, as well as successfully using DNA sequencing to find the source and cure for eye cysts in the birds.

Thanks to Spence's encouragement, Orange Lake has received the ARDA Circle of Excellence (ACE) Award for Project Excellence in 2002, the ACE Community Service Award in 1996 and 1997 and the ACE Award for Philanthropy in 2005. In 2003, the ACE Volunteer of the Year Award went to Orange Lake's Senior VP of Executive Administration Jim Peters. Noteworthy of Spence's courage, strength of character and dedication to professionalism in the industry was his continued and loyal support of ARDA's Awards Program, even when several major industry competitors declined to participate for fear of losing their most talented employees. Spence not only directed that his company continue to support the program, but increased the level of nominations and financial support to \$10,000 annually.

Another example of the difference he made on behalf of timeshare is the way in which Spence brought quality standards to the industry during its largely unregulated early beginnings. He voluntarily demanded the highest standards in obtaining consumer satisfaction during the first decade of the timeshare industry, which contributed to a large segment of the consuming public's positive opinion towards vacation ownership. Spence's contributions to the industry in this area are immeasurable. His performance produced such a high confidence level among consumers, that his example can be said to have convinced large public companies to enter this segment of the industry. The entrance of these major brands was of great benefit, as it led to the enhancement of the industry's reputation as a viable alternative vacation concept for the average person. His efforts in this area are ongoing and are a cornerstone and testament to the character of this lifetime achiever.

He is a lifetime supporter of ARDA at the highest level and has maintained not one, but two trustee memberships since the introduction of the Trustee Program. In addition to a great number of community outreach efforts he endorses, Spence is a major supporter of the industry's charity of choice, the Christel House Foundation. Over the past four years under his guidance, Orange Lake has raised over \$400,000 for this very worthy cause.

Spence possesses a unique combination of a dedication to family values, a keen interest in maintaining the highest standards of ethics, a solid Harvard education and real-life experience in producing successful projects that has helped him develop his character to be one that is friendly and approachable, while at the same time, wise and insightful.

Spence Wilson is a true Southern gentleman, imbued with characteristics from a time gone by: gracious, loyal, spiritual, passionate, impassioned and a leader by example. He is ready to do business on a handshake and take people for their word. Thanks to his professionalism, integrity and character, Spence has had a powerful influence on what timeshare is today and will be in the future.