

Jerry Rich:
a life of hard work
& rich harvest



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is because **she encouraged me**
all along the way.” }*



By Cara Mossington, Calamos Global Exchange Editor & Calamos Wealth Management, Director of Marketing

If you haven’t heard of Rich Harvest Farms, I am sure you have heard of Wall Street. Jerry Rich made history with both. While this wildly successful 6’5” man seems a bit intimidating at first, one is quickly set at ease with his humble kindness and soft voice.

Mr. Rich grew up in a hard-working, middle-class family, inheriting a passion for technology and science from his late father, Anthony “AJ” Rich. After graduating from Northern Illinois University, he joined his father’s business Rich Inc., which provided schools and hospitals with communication systems. Mr. Rich, known as a pioneer in integrating computers, saw a huge opportunity in the back room of a New York trading floor. Seeing all the computers and screens the traders were using, he had no idea why they were not integrating them. His family’s company had been doing it for years and his technology solutions soon enabled clients all over Wall Street to monitor numerous pieces of information on an integrated and ergonomically designed system.

In the late 1980s, the Rich family merged their technology company with Reuters out of London and together they built trading room systems around the world. Mr. Rich then decided to focus his time on golf and growing the game in youth. What started as designing and building one golf hole and a practice area near his home in Sugar Grove, Illinois turned into what is known today as Rich Harvest Farms — an ultra-private, members-only golf club.

The course’s 18 holes are spread over 1,800 acres of nature, but the Rich Harvest Farms experience doesn’t stop there. Also on the property are luxurious lodging accommodations, a private car museum, miles of horseback riding trails, and three lakes for fishing. Not only has Rich Harvest Farms been consistently ranked in Golf Digest’s “America’s 100 Greatest Golf Courses,” but the course has also garnered national and international attention when it hosted the 2009 Solheim Cup and 2012 Ryder Cup Captain’s Challenge. In the future, Rich Harvest Farms will host the 2015 Palmer Cup and Western Amateur, as well as the LPGA’s International Crown in 2016.

*Above: Jerry Rich and his wife, Betty Rich
Left: Rich Harvest Farms club house*

In 1998, Mr. Rich along with his long-time friend Don Springer, founded the Kids Golf Foundation, which is dedicated to bringing the sport of golf into the lives of youth. The Foundation, a large part of his legacy, supports junior golf programs that introduce children to the sport of golf, its fundamentals, rules, history and etiquette.

Mr. Rich graciously agreed to be interviewed for our Calamos Global Exchange. After spending over two hours hearing about his interesting, moving and successful life, I know you will enjoy a bit of his story.

{Q} *My boss and your friend, John Calamos Sr., mentioned something funny to me when we were speaking about this interview. John quipped that when you found out that you had a slim chance of getting into Augusta National Golf Club, you decided to build your own. Can you tell me about that?*

{A} I did! I remember playing at Augusta with a friend and when I mentioned how great it would be to become a member, he said “Forget it. You have to be invited by the board, and it’s just about impossible to get in.” I went home and told my wife: “I don’t think I’ll ever be a member at Augusta National; so I’m going to build my own.”

We bought the farm because it was something my wife and I had always wanted to do. I built the golf course because I love the game and also wanted to be close to my wife who had been diagnosed with MS.

It was important to me that I was her primary caregiver. She was the biggest encourager in my life. I would be out working on the farm and check on her every couple of hours to see if she needed anything.

{Q} *Your father and business partner was known as a technology guru and entrepreneur who saw much technological advancement from the transistor radio to the World Wide Web in his 96 years before passing away in 2012. You mentioned that “He was very thankful that he was able to see all of that and be involved in it, not only in business but in his personal life.” What are some of your favorite memories of him?*

{A} My dad got his start in technology at a very young age. He bought his first crystal set from the Sears catalog when he was 13 years old. That device that simply ran on radio waves was his first introduction to technology. A couple years later, he saw an ad for a build your own radio which also had a short wave band. After he built it, he heard a local ham radio operator, which sparked another interest. This led him to take and pass the ham operator exam as well as learn Morse code.

At 16, he opened a shop in town to repair radios. This was in the 1930s. An idea came to him that he could make more money if he also sold refrigerators, which were becoming more popular than the ice box. He called Philco, who made radios and appliances, and became a distributor. Soon thereafter, he met my mother and they were married.

Shortly after my twin sister, Janice, and I were born in 1938, World War II broke out and times were tough for everyone. My father’s Philco rep mentioned that the military was hiring people who knew electronics and were ham radio operators to train officers. The United States Signal Corps needed instructors to train the Army on how to use and repair the radio equipment used for the Marines hitting the beachheads at Normandy. He called the Army corporate office and went in for an interview.



As my father was getting up to leave the interview the Colonel said, "Where do you think you are going?" to which he replied, "home." The colonel then informed my dad, "Son, we are at war," and that he was not going anywhere. The Colonel added his first class would be taught that evening at 7:00 p.m. on Navy Pier! My family moved into a small apartment in downtown Chicago. My dad taught officers who carried radio transmitters and receivers on their backs, which gave detailed information about enemy positions. Those men were one of the key targets for the opposition and most of his students were killed.

In 1952, my dad started his own business in communications, Rich Inc. That same year he developed a multi-communication system that is still used in schools and hospitals today.

{Q} *Do you have any favorite moments of success as a technology entrepreneur?*

{A} Yes, I do. After graduating from Northern Illinois University, I worked for my father's company and we were a distributor for a local communications equipment manufacturer. We sold equipment to schools, hospitals and churches. My father always taught me that you can't become complacent with the products; you need to follow the technology.

As the years passed, my father wanted to enhance their equipment with other products to improve the outcomes for clients. They weren't keen on us using foreign equipment, so my father decided to go into business for himself. He went to the bank and borrowed money, putting everything he owned as collateral for the loan, and Rich Inc. was born. We began designing multi-communications systems for schools and universities. By that time the suburbs of Chicago were growing. We were designing systems for all the schools. We put our own manufacturing together and worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It nearly killed us! The end result, it made us a much better company in the long run.

In 1974, the Apple 1 came out and we bought the first one. We quickly learned how to use digital signals to control analog devices using computers. The same year Bill Gates designed DOS, we designed ROS (Rich Operating System). While Gates pursued personal computing, we pursued applications and device control. We went on to integrate audio, video and data in educational and medical centers, which ultimately led to the integration of computer terminals in Wall Street.

ROS opened up all kinds of opportunities for us. We were putting in communication and control systems in hospitals, which connected patient room telephones with things like televisions and the nurse's stations. We wanted to provide the best communication systems to the hospitals. We convinced the insurance companies to agree to pay for half of the technology because they saw it as patient education to reduce a patient's hospital stay. Within six months, we were selling multimillion dollar systems to hospitals in major cities across the country. Twenty years later, we were thankful for the experience in learning how to become a pure manufacturer, which led us to see the opportunity on Wall Street.

While on a trip to Manhattan visiting one of our New York crews, I visited a friend who worked as a government bond trader for Chase Bank. When he showed me where he worked, I couldn't believe my eyes! Each bond trader had to gather information from 10 or more different screens, each with their own keyboard. There was no integration! I asked my friend how he got anything done. My heart was beating so hard, I knew I could come up with a system that could combine all of the data. I asked my friend, "What if I could eliminate all those terminals and put four screens with one keypad at each station?" Tom said, "Could you do that?" Honestly, I wasn't 100% sure, but I said "Yes!" The bank asked me to build a prototype.

My team of engineers built the prototype and we brought it to NY and hooked it up. The head of the trading floor called me soon after the installation and said, "We love your system. How soon can you build us nine more?" Two months later, we delivered the nine systems and the word spread quickly.

Our business exploded from there and we did a majority of the banks and investment houses worldwide. In the early 1980s, Reuters made an offer to buy our company and we accepted. I stayed on for four years. And I'm very proud that some of our systems are still being used today.

{Q} *There is a beautiful photograph of your wife Betty that took my breath away during my last visit. After touring the many buildings and hearing that each is reflective of your wife Betty's taste, I certainly have an appreciation for her enjoyment of a warm, country ambience and felt it as soon as I entered into any of the many rooms. What was her role in the family business and philanthropic endeavors?*

{A} While my wife was not involved in the family business, she always wanted to know how things were going. We were married for 52 years when she passed away. We met in college and dated for four years. There were points where I was not making much money but she always managed the household and the finances. We never fought once in our entire marriage. We had "discussions" but never went to bed angry.

She was an inspiration. When she was 33, she was diagnosed with MS and 12 years later, she was in a wheel chair. Everything I've done at Rich Harvest Farms is because she encouraged me all along the way.

{Q} *For the past 10 years, your son Keith has been the General Manager at Rich Harvest Farms. I was interested to hear that he too was a technology mastermind, having been the founder and CEO of ISR Inc. (Integrated Systems by Rich), which empowered people with technology in their homes with electronic architecture that was recognized as Best of the Best Home*

Convenience Technology by The Robb Report. His technology and company landed him on The Oprah Winfrey Show, Fox TV and CBS to name a few. Did his technology find its place in the buildings at Rich Harvest Farms?

{A} Yes. There are buildings on the farm with Keith's technology, including the Pavilion and my father's former house. One thing ISR did was build systems for high-end homes. The systems controlled everything from heat and sound to window treatments and alarms. He put systems in for the wealthy and famous. He did that for 18 years before coming to Rich Harvest Farms.

{Q} *Your personal collection of over 80 vintage automobiles is fascinating and is enjoyed by members and guests. How did you start collecting?*

{A} Back in 1955 when I was in high school, my uncle came to live with us. He had a 1953 MG TD. When I turned 16 and got my license, I came home and my uncle threw me the keys and gave me his car for the night. I took it out and had a ball. I drove so much I had to fill the tank up twice. I think I went to every A&W around town. That was the beginning of my passion for automobiles and I began working on cars rebuilding engines and the body of restorations.

In 1967, I purchased my first restorable car, a 1961 300 SL Mercedes Roadster. I still have the car and it is my most prized because I put so much hard work into it.

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{Q} *Was it hard to make the transition into a new venture after you sold your business to Reuters?*

{A} No, I am an entrepreneur. When I decided to leave Reuters, I wanted to do something I had always wanted to do — to own my own farm and design a golf hole. We were living in Oak Brook at the time and we didn't want to live too far away from our friends.

Sugar Grove was appealing because they had farm land for sale and it was also halfway between Northern Illinois University and Oak Brook. We ended up purchasing 11 farms all adjacent to each other, which make up the 1800 acres we have today. Over 29 years we have built and remodeled 40 buildings, including housing for 15 of our staff members. I have the best staff due to benefits we provide them.

{Q} *You have had many successes in life from your technology achievements, to your world renowned golf course, to your charitable work and family. Were there specific people or moments in your childhood that propelled you to dream big and go after those dreams?*

{A} My father was the biggest influencer in my life. He was a perfectionist. I remember during the summers growing up, my dad always had me working on projects. He would get me up at 7:00 a.m. every day before he went to work. He would give me a project such as painting the house or spading the garden. He taught me the importance of getting up early and getting involved as well as always showing me if you're going to do something, do it right.

He also taught me about the right way to handle things when upset. He would tell me, "When you get excited or upset about something, just back off and relax a bit." He lived by example and I remember this helping me in many situations. When I would get upset, I would remember my dad and tell myself, "Back off, take a deep breath and don't pick up the phone in anger." My dad would also say, "You don't want to burn that bridge; that doesn't solve the problem."

Mr. Rich is excited to continue to grow the game of golf when Rich Harvest Farms plays host to two amateur events, the Palmer Cup and the Western Amateur, next summer. To learn more, visit www.richharvestfarms.com.

