

W. David Tarver

Building a Successful International Company was his Proving Ground



W. David Tarver
BSE MSE EE '75, '76

"I wanted to prove that I could do this."

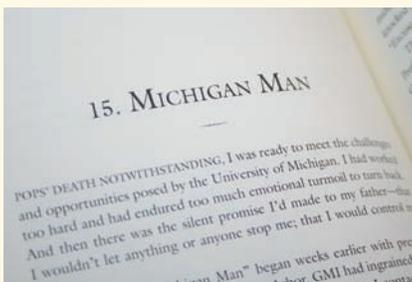
"This" was starting his own company – a dream formed when David was in high school working hard to win the Flint Area Science Fair in Flint, Mich. A second place win only fueled his determination.

William David Tarver, born in 1953, has vivid memories of certain incidents in the civil rights movement which, he stated, "made me acutely aware of race and the limitations placed on my father's generation. I wanted to prove that a new day had come."

After high school, David attended General Motors Institute (GMI) – a special program that gave him a free education and allowed him to work at the same time. While there, he walked in on a MOOG electronic music concert. Fascinated by the combination of art and engineering, he decided to build his own music synthesizer.

He continued work on the synthesizer after transferring to Michigan. "In my bedroom I had a lab table with an oscilloscope and all the circuits that I was building for this digital electronic music synthesizer. It became my master's thesis."

His advisor at Michigan was Prof. Leo McAfee, the first African American faculty member hired at the College of Engineering. Upon graduation, David accepted a position at the famous Bell Telephone Laboratories (Bell Labs), widely regarded as the place where the leading scientists of the day did their research.

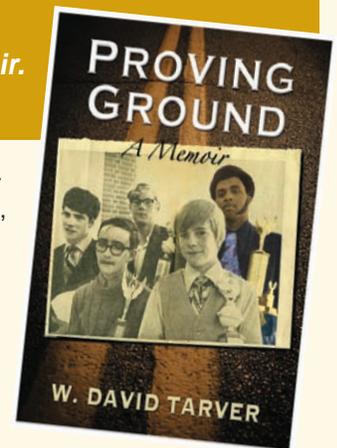


"I discovered at Bell Labs a telephone network simulator that had almost the exact same technology as my music synthesizer.

This analog device cost \$6,000 and it needed a \$10,000 device next to it to figure out what it

was doing. I thought – if I do a digital version of the device, I can sell it for a lot of money. I decided to build a telephone network simulator, and started to work on the device in my basement with two colleagues from Bell Labs: Steve Moore and Charles Simmons. That became our first product. You could say the groundwork for that first product was laid here at Michigan."

Tarver, W. David.
Proving Ground: A Memoir.
Cypress House, 2012.



David left Bell Labs in 1983 and co-founded Telecom Analysis Systems, Inc. with Moore and Simmons. The company finally moved out of his basement in 1984, and went on to become a successful international firm – with sales in Japan that in some months rivaled and even surpassed U.S. sales.

When he sold the company in 1995 to Spirent (then Bowthorpe) for \$30M, he took a moment to reflect on the fruition of his boyhood dream. He did it. David recalled, "The day I sold the company it really hit me that I could do what I wanted – I felt free."

He continued to work at Spirent for an additional four years, becoming president of the telecommunications business unit. In this capacity, he spearheaded development of a business that achieved sales of more than \$250 million and a market value in excess of \$2 billion.

For David – leaving the company in 1999 was not the end of the story – just the beginning of a new chapter. He became a community organizer, and helped raise the test scores of 8th grade students in Red Bank, NJ from a paltry 25 percent passing rate in 2001 to more than 60 percent in 2005.

In addition to community support, he knows it also takes resources to support a top notch education – resources that many lack. To honor the sacrifices made by his parents, and to open opportunity to undergraduate students, he established the Fred and Louise Tarver Scholarship Fund.

David recently moved back to Michigan with his family. Those fortunate to attend his book signing party in Birmingham, Michigan in late May heard firsthand his strong clear jazz tenor voice – yet another of his many talents! His book, *Proving Ground: A Memoir*, offers inspiration and encouragement to anyone with a dream, and the determination to make their dream a reality. ●



David singing Stevie Wonder's "I Wish" at the Tallulah Bar & Grill in Birmingham, Mich.