



Neil and Ronald Reagan's boyhood home in Dixon

M *The man in the* MOON

He grew up in Dixon, went to Eureka College, worked at a radio station, played in Hollywood movies, and was elected president on more than one occasion — and it's not who you think it is

Editor's note: The following article was written by Dixon resident Tom Wadsworth, a writer, speaker, and a sixth-generation Dixonite. His background includes careers in ministry, broadcasting, corporate communications, and 20 years as the editor of a national trade magazine. He holds two master's degrees and a PhD in New Testament.

DIXON LIVING
**Guest
column**



**TOM
Wadsworth**

Millions are aware of the story of Ronald Wilson Reagan, the Dixon boy known as "Dutch," who became president of the United States. Very few, however, are aware of the story of Neil "Moon" Reagan, President Reagan's only sibling and brother. Yet even fewer are aware of how Dutch helped Moon to go to college and launch a remarkably successful career in California.

First, it must be noted that Neil was older than Ronald. Neil was born September 16, 1908, while Ronald was born February 6, 1911, 2-1/2 years later. But the rapid early rise of Ronald's career resulted in Neil

often being viewed as the younger brother.

As Neil put it in a 1981 interview, "I guess I've really never gotten over it completely. I automatically became the younger brother."

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Neil Reagan, brother of
President Ronald Reagan

The steamer trunk

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Neil's "younger brother" image started as early as 1929. When he graduated from South Dixon High School in 1926, he landed a decent office job working at the Medusa Portland Cement plant in Dixon.

"When I graduated from high school, I was smarter than any college professor," said Neil, "so I saw no need for college."

At that time, only 30 percent of students finished high school, and a tiny fraction of these went on to graduate from college. So, in 1928 when little brother Ronald ("Dutch") went off to Eureka College, Neil was content to stay in Dixon doing "cost work" at the cement plant.

Dutch, however, persisted in urging Neil to join him in Eureka and get a college education. But Neil just laughed. After all, he was getting paid \$125 a month, which was better than a manual laborer's wage at the plant.

In the summer of 1929 before the beginning of Ron's sophomore year, Ron made a significant effort to pave the way for Neil to go to college. He arranged a scholarship for Neil to play on the Eureka football team that fall. He secured a job for Neil to serve food at the girls' dormitory. He also arranged for Neil to pledge to Ron's Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity. All Neil needed

was to raise \$10 a month to pay for his room at the frat house. Dutch went one step further. In September, just before leaving for college, Ron had saved enough money to buy Neil a steamer trunk to facilitate his move to Eureka. But again, Neil just laughed.

He recalled: "When the day came that (Ron) was to go back to school that fall, I got up and went to work (at the cement plant). When I came home that evening, I dashed upstairs and there sat the trunk in the middle of the floor."

When he went downstairs for supper, he said to his mother, "Nelle, I thought Dutch was going back to school today."

"With a tear in her eye she said, 'He did, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. He left the trunk, thinking you'd change your mind.'" The hardened big brother just laughed again.

The next morning Neil went back to work at the cement plant. Before he went to his desk he told his boss, Mr. Kennedy, the "very funny story" about Ron's scheming and the steamer trunk. But Mr. Kennedy didn't laugh.

About ten o'clock that morning, the boss's secretary came to Neil and said, "Here's your paycheck, Mr. Reagan."

Neil replied, "Paycheck? It's not payday."

She said, "It is for you."

Stunned, he asked, "Do you mean I'm fired?"

"Call it what you want to," she said. "Mr. Kennedy says if you're not smart enough to take the good thing your brother has fixed up for you, you're not smart enough to work for him."

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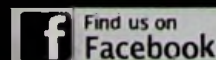
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So, Neil left the cement plant office and walked the long stretch along River Road, heading back into Dixon. It was one of those life-changing walks when you realize you're at a critical fork in life's road. He was 21, unemployed, and holding his last paycheck in his hands. So, he stopped at the bank to cash the check, went home, packed the steamer trunk, and then headed south for Eureka.

College standouts

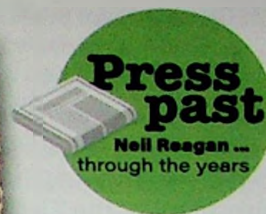
His mother Nelle called Ron on the phone. "I've got news for you," Nelle said. "Your brother Neil doesn't think college is a joke anymore. He

doesn't want to work; he wants to be educated. He wants to come to Eureka."

"I couldn't believe it," said Ron, who had always viewed Neil as a "sophisticate." But he was pleased that Neil was going to join him in college.

When Neil walked onto the Eureka campus, the reality set in. He was just a freshman, while his little brother was a well-known sophomore involved in sports, drama, the fraternity, and campus activities.

In essence, the big brother had become the little brother. And no matter how much Neil succeeded, he would remain the "little brother" in Ronald's shadow for the rest of his life.



Neil was elected the president of the Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE) fraternity while attending Eureka College. He also served as the editor of the year-book, and he was

on the school's cheerleading squad with brother Ron.

[FACEBOOK.COM/TAU.KAPPA.EPSILON.FRATERNITY](https://www.facebook.com/tau.kappa.epsilon.fraternity)

Moon entered Eureka College in September 1929. Only one month later, the Great Depression descended on America, triggered by the Wall Street Crash of October 1929. Over 1,300 banks failed in the next year, and millions of Americans lost their jobs. But thanks to Ron's arrangements for Moon's scholarship, dorm job, and frat housing, Moon was relatively insulated from the collapsing economy around him.

MOON cont'd to page 14



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Three years later in the spring of 1932, Moon was thriving at Eureka College. That March, an article appeared in the Dixon Telegraph titled, "Neil and Ronald Reagan Make Good." Neil was "very popular on campus" and had been elected the president of the TKE fraternity and president of the Campus Council on Religion. He also served as the editor of the yearbook, and he was on the school's cheerleading squad with brother Ron.

Dutch, a graduating senior in 1928, had received four letters in football, was a student instructor in swimming, president of the Booster Club, and president of the Senate, the student governing body. In Neil's senior year, he would follow his brother as president of the student governing body.

Tithing for Moon

In January 1933, Dutch landed a job as a full-time staff announcer at WOC radio in Davenport.

It paid \$100 a month, which was good money during the Depression.

But brother Neil was struggling financially to get through his final year of college, and that fact weighed heavily on Ron.

Nelle had always told Ronald that "the Lord's share was a tenth." So, Ron consulted with a local minister, asking, "Would the Lord consider His share as being His, if I gave it to my

brother to help him through school?" The minister said yes. So, Dutch gave ten dollars a month to Moon, which was just enough to help Moon finish his last year of college.

Surprise audition

Ron's support of Neil continued into the next critical phase of Neil's life. In 1933, Neil graduated from Eureka College with a degree in economics and sociology, the same degree that Ron

earned the year before. But by 1933, the Depression was at its worst. One-fourth of the U.S. workforce was unemployed, and household incomes had plummeted over the previous four years. Back home in Dixon, the cement plant had closed its doors, putting hundreds out of work.

Neil planned to go to law school at Northwestern University in the fall, a strategy that would keep him in the insulated environment of academia. But in the summer of 1933, Ronald called him and asked him to drive Ron's new Nash convertible from the dealership in central Illinois to Des Moines.

Ron also urged Moon to stay for two or three days and see the 50,000-watt radio station (WHO) where Ron now worked. Neil had never been in a radio station, so he accepted and made the journey to Des Moines. He didn't realize that the trip would change his life in several ways.

MOON cont'd to page 15



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As Ron was showing Neil around the station, they walked by the booth where potential sports announcers were auditioning. When audition number 12 finished, Ron presented Neil to the program director, saying "This is my brother, Moon."

The manager then suggested that Moon give it a try. Dutch said, "Sure, why not?"

Neil was then asked to read the script for a commercial and describe three or four plays of an imaginary live Big Ten college football game. Since he was a big sports fan and knew all the players, he had no problem delivering this make-believe play-by-play broadcast.

The program director liked what he heard, and he offered Neil a job on the spot. "What does it pay?" asked Neil. The station could pay thirty dollars a week, which was about the same as his salary at the cement plant four years ago.

Ron interjected, "Look, don't worry about it now. You can live in my apartment; that won't cost you anything. We'll get by."

Neil replied, "OK, I'll forget about the idea of law school."

Hollywood success

So, Neil followed his little brother's footsteps, not just to Eureka College, but now into broadcasting, at a time when radios were becoming a staple of the American home.



Like his brother Ron, Neil found work in broadcasting.

Neil and Ronald were not only living together and doing sports at the same station, but they also had a show together on Friday nights during the football season. On the show, the two of them would reveal their picks for the winners of the upcoming games, debate each other's picks, and laugh over who was wrong last Friday night.

In Des Moines, Neil found his future wife, Bessie Hoffman, and they were married in 1935. But by then Neil had been transferred to WHO's sister station in Davenport (WOC), while Ron stayed in Des Moines at WHO.

In 1937, Ron got his next big break when he landed a movie contract with Warner Brothers in Hollywood. Only three months after he moved to California, Ron moved his parents, Jack and Nelle Reagan, to Hollywood from Dixon. This meant that Neil and Bessie were the only family members back in Illinois-Iowa.

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After a few years of announcing sports and news at WOC in Davenport, Neil was soon promoted to program director. But in the summer of 1939 Neil went to Hollywood to visit his movie-star brother and fiancée, Jane Wyman. The visit included a tour through the Warner Brothers studios, learning about film contracts and film production.

California here I come

WOC and moving to Hollywood on February 1 to become a movie actor. There, he lived only a half-mile from Ron and his new wife, Jane Wyman (married in January 1940).

Neil's acting career required some preparation. On July 11, 1940, the Quad City Times newspaper reported, "For several months (Neil) was placed on a rigid diet by movie officials, who ordered him to lose 20 pounds. During this time, he went to the movie school, learning the tricks of the screen."

Moon's first movie role was a bit part in the 1940 film "Tugboat Annie Sails Again." His name doesn't even appear on the promotional movie posters. But two other movie stars appear prominently on the poster: Ronald Reagan and Jane Wyman. Once again, little brother Ron led big brother Neil into a successful venture.

But Neil's success did not come as an actor; it came in the greater field of entertainment and media. Even though he would appear in five movies, all were minor roles. So, to make ends meet, Neil landed a job in November 1940 as the featured newscaster and sportscaster at KFWB radio in Hollywood.

KFWB also had a connection to brother Ron. The radio station was owned by Ronald's employer, Warner Brothers, which also owned the "Tugboat Annie" movie. And KFWB's station was on the Warner Brothers lot, where Ronald Reagan filmed many of his movies.

It may have been during this visit when Dutch again arranged an audition for his big brother. Only a few months later, in January 1940, newspapers in Iowa and Illinois announced that Neil was leaving



ANOTHER REAGAN—While Ronald Reagan is in the Army, brother Neil will represent the House of Reagan on the screen. He is shown with Marguerite Chapman at Columbia Studios where he is making his screen debut in a Navy picture.

Here for Thanksgiving—In Movies



J. Neil "Moon" Reagan, Davenport, radio station WOC's popular former announcer, will be here for Thanksgiving on the screen of the Orpheum Theater starting Wednesday in his first picture, "Tugboat Annie Sails Again," starring Marjorie Bonham, Alan Hale and Mr. and Mrs. Ronald "Dutch" Reagan. Just as brother "Dutch" started his career in the movies, so does "Moon" as a radio announcer. The



NEIL REAGAN. (Rides Into Movies on Tugboat.)

Press past
Neil Reagan ... through the years

Neil managed to grab some ink in the press during his brief stint on the big screen.

MOON cont'd to page 17

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A stellar career

Neil remained a top announcer at KFVB until 1944 when he joined CBS as a senior director in Hollywood. He used all his acting and radio experience to become known as an expert director and producer of 30-minute weekly radio shows. After being at CBS for only 11 months, he was hired in 1945 at McCann-Erickson, one of the world's largest advertising agencies, where he continued to produce radio shows and become a renowned expert in media and advertising.

In 1951 Neil was elected president of the Hollywood Advertising Club, and later that same year, he was elected president of Advertising Association of the West. This role took him on speaking engagements all over the West Coast. In 1952, representing the advertising industry, he met with California Governor Earl Warren and even went to the White House.

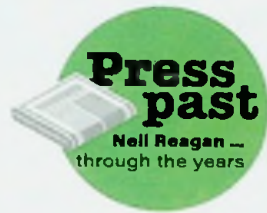
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Ad Club to Hear Association Head



FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE — "Bierstube" featured latest meeting of Los Angeles Advertising Club at Statler-Hilton. President Frederic Olson (l) and chairman of the day J. Neil Reagan (r) look on as pretty TV and movie actress Dawn Wells puts Alpine hat on main speaker A. J. McIsaac, senior vice president, Lucky Lager Brewing Co.

NEW EXECUTIVE—The appointment of J. Neil Reagan, manager of the Hollywood office of McCann-Erickson, Inc. as a vice president of the advertising agency, was announced today by Marion Harper, Jr., company president. Reagan is past president of the Hollywood Ad Club and president of the Advertising Association of the West.



Neil made the switch from a successful career in radio to one in advertising in 1945 when he was hired by ad agency McCann-Erickson, where he was later promoted to vice president. In 1951, Neil was elected president of the Advertising Association of the West.

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Then, in 1960, he was elected president of the Los Angeles Advertising Club, a prestigious position in LA society and the greater advertising world.

Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, he and Bessie stayed in constant contact with brother Ron, who lived in the same general area. The two Reagan families would usually spend Thanksgiving and Christmas with each other, even after Ron became governor of California (1967-1975).

Goldwater account

Ron did Neil another huge favor in 1964 when Reagan was getting involved in Barry Goldwater's campaign for president.

Dutch noticed that Goldwater's TV commercials were lacking, and he urged the Republican presidential candidate to contact brother Neil at McCann-Erickson.

Goldwater did. Neil made sure that the agency switch was conducted ethically and according to protocol, and McCann-Erickson ended up landing the huge Goldwater account.

But Goldwater's campaign was already in serious trouble. The 1963 Kennedy assassination had unleashed a flood of compassion for the Democratic party. Plus, Goldwater made several major gaffes during the campaign, and no amount of savvy advertising could turn the tide in his favor.

Ironically, the one tactic that injected significant new life into Goldwater's campaign was Ronald Reagan's famous speech, "A Time for Choosing," which was broadcast nationally Oct. 26, 1964, just eight days before the election. One source says that it was Neil who convinced Goldwater to ask Reagan to deliver this speech.

Reagan's speech electrified the audience and attracted national attention. But it was all too little, too late for Goldwater. He carried only six states and lost by a landslide. The Oct. 26 speech, however, turned the Republican spotlight on Ronald Reagan as a rising star in the party.

Handling Goldwater's advertising was a significant business deal for Neil Reagan and McCann-Erickson. More importantly, it gave Neil and his agency rich experience in handling media for a major political campaign. And they would soon be able to build on all this experience for an upcoming significant gubernatorial campaign ... for Ronald Reagan.

Moon helps out Dutch

That same year (1964), an opportunity arose for Neil to help Ron at a crucial juncture in his life. As

part of Neil's duties with McCann-Erickson, he was in charge of the "Death Valley Days" TV show, which was looking for a new on-air spokesman and star.



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At the time, Ron's TV and movie career was at a standstill. In 1962, he just ended 10 years as the spokesman and star of CBS's weekly "General Electric Theatre," and he was without a paying job.

Neil, knowing Ron's acute skills as a spokesman, offered the Death Valley Days' job to Ron. At first, Dutch declined the offer, but Neil knew how to get Ron's attention. Neil went to Ron's agent and pitched the idea. The agent, who was highly motivated to get Ron to say yes, used his best persuasion skills with Ron at a luncheon meeting at Hollywood's famous Brown Derby restaurant.

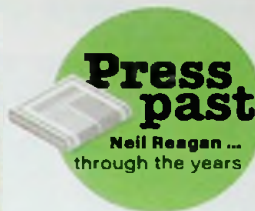
Moon happened to be at the same restaurant at the same time. After Ron realized the wisdom of the deal, he came over to Neil and sheepishly accepted the job offer.

The politics of brotherhood



Brother delegate

Neil Reagan, a delegate from Rancho Santa Fe, gets ready for the opening of the 1980 GOP convention in Detroit, where he will see his brother, Ronald Reagan, nominated for president of the United States.



Neil was there to help his brother when he ran for governor of California in 1966, and again in 1980, when Ronald ran for president.

Neil was there to help his brother when he ran for governor of California in 1966, and again in 1980, when Ronald ran for president. He defeated former vice president Richard Nixon, and Brown was strongly considered as a vice presidential running mate for Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964.

The "Death Valley Days" job was more than just another TV gig. It helped Ron maintain a high public profile at a time when more people were urging him to run for governor of California. Ron kept the TV job until 1966, when he finally entered the governor's race.

Neil again became helpful to his brother during the campaign, which many thought was an uphill battle. After all, Ronald Reagan was a political neophyte who had never run for public office. It didn't help that he had recently switched parties.

On top of that, he was opposing the incumbent Democratic Governor Pat Brown. In the gubernatorial race of 1962, Brown

MOON cont'd to page 20 & 21



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Dutch & Moon

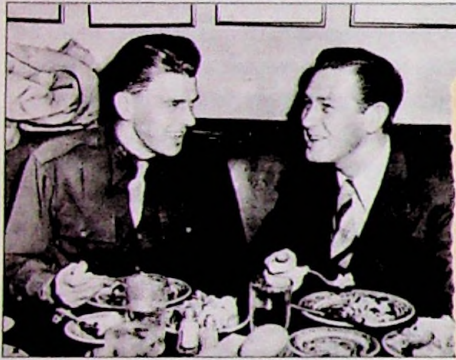
According to Neil's obituary in the New York Times, Neil picked up his nickname on the high school football team, derived from the Moon Mullins comic strip character. His brother's nickname, according to President Reagan's autobiography, came from his father, who remarked during Ron's childhood that he that he looked like "a fat little Dutchman." Reagan himself has also stated that the nickname was reinforced by another remark his father made, about the "Dutch boy" haircut his son had as a young child.



WHITE HOUSE PRESS PHOTO



WHITE HOUSE PRESS PHOTO



Dutch has always been nuisance in Moon's life

By JOE FRIZOLE
T. A. Staff Writer
RANCHO SANTA FE — After four years of being called "the fat little Dutchman" by his father, Ronald Reagan, Neil Reagan has a new nickname: "Dutch." It is a name that has stuck, and it is a name that has caused Neil to be known as "Dutch" for the rest of his life. The name was first used by his father when he was a young boy, and it has stuck ever since. Neil has always been a bit of a nuisance in his father's life, and the nickname "Dutch" has only reinforced that. Neil has always been a bit of a nuisance in his father's life, and the nickname "Dutch" has only reinforced that.

Above: Neil and Ron, during Reagan's time in Hollywood during the 1940s. **Center top:** Ron and Neil during Reagan's first inauguration, in 1981. **Center bottom:** A 1980s newspaper profile on Neil. **Right:** Neil joined his brother and wife Nancy for a visit to their boyhood home in Dixon in 1984.

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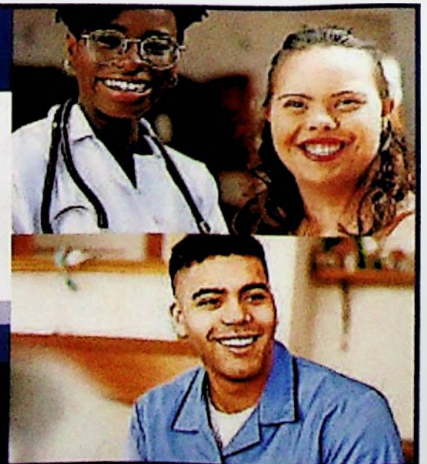
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Brown scoffed at Reagan's inexperience, calling him a superficial Hollywood actor who starred in the "Bedtime for Bonzo" movie. Reagan's team was challenged to build a campaign that would overcome this onslaught of ridicule from a popular incumbent.

Enter big brother Neil Reagan. Armed with 30 years of radio, media, and advertising experience, Moon proceeded to mastermind the media for Ron's 1966 campaign. It was a great way for Neil to use his own prowess to return the enormous career favors that Ron had done for him.

It worked ... in a big way. Ronald Reagan defeated Pat Brown by a landslide, winning 56 of the state's 59 counties.

But Neil contended that the campaign's magic was all due to Ronald — his winning personality, his photographic memory for details, and his world-class communication skills. Neil's strategy was to avoid gimmickry and just get Ronald to talk directly to people and to the camera. Knowing Ronald's audience appeal at "General Electric Theatre" and "Death Valley Days," Neil was confident that his little brother could win hearts and minds by the direct approach.

Neil and McCann-Erickson again returned in 1970 to handle advertising for Reagan's reelection campaign. Even though California was becoming a popular haven for leftist radicals, the conservative Governor Reagan won handily again, winning 47 of California's 59 counties.

Honoring the brothers in Illinois

In December 1970, immediately after Reagan was reelected as governor, Dutch and Moon returned for a visit to their home state of Illinois. Eureka College,

their alma mater, asked them to dedicate the new Reagan Physical Education Center, named for the school's two renowned alumni.

In bestowing the honor on the two brothers, the school said, "They have maintained high standards of character and ethics in their dealings with both friends and opponents. They hold in high regard their heritage, family, and college and have acknowledged their deep appreciation of these values."

Indeed, from Dixon to Eureka, from Eureka to Iowa, and from Iowa to California, these two brothers maintained great integrity and demonstrated the strength of family values in their pursuit of excellence.

Brothers to the end

Moon retired in 1973 and was able to enjoy Dutch's greatest success, being elected — and reelected — president of the United States in 1980 and 1984.

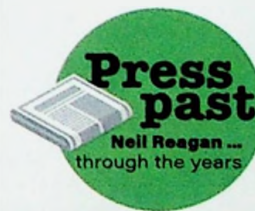
You might think that Reagan would use the power of the office to grant a plum political office to his brother or to his children. But



AP WIREPHOTO

Neil Reagan, a onetime announcer at KFVB radio in Los Angeles, has died at age 88. He was the older brother of President Ronald Reagan.

President Reagan's brother, Neil, dies



Neil's death in 1996 made headlines in papers around the nation, including the San Bernardino County Sun (above), and the New York Times, which described Reagan as a "spirited, easy-going man with a whimsical sense of humor."

Ronald Reagan opposed nepotism, desiring to keep the office free of corruption.

Moon had no problem with that. He once said, "Just being the president's brother shouldn't give you any advantage."

As Ronald gained great stature around the world as "the Great Communicator," it was clear that he had become "the big brother." Neil was still a highly accomplished and admired professional, and Ron was still the younger of the two. But Ron's star was shining globally in a way that few have ever achieved.

Moon's health began to fail in 1996. But through his final days of trial, Ron was in constant contact with his older brother, his companion and friend. Neil finally died on December 11, 1996, at age 88 in San Diego.

Announcing the death of his older brother, the former president simply said, "We will miss him terribly." ■

Source: Information for this story was gleaned from interviews, documents, books, and over 300 newspaper articles published between 1932 and 2010.