


*The magazine that showcases the faces behind the places*

# Saratoga

## COUNTY LIVING

WINTER 2000-2001

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A black and white portrait of actor David Hyde Pierce, smiling and wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. The background is dark.

# DAVID HYDE PIERCE

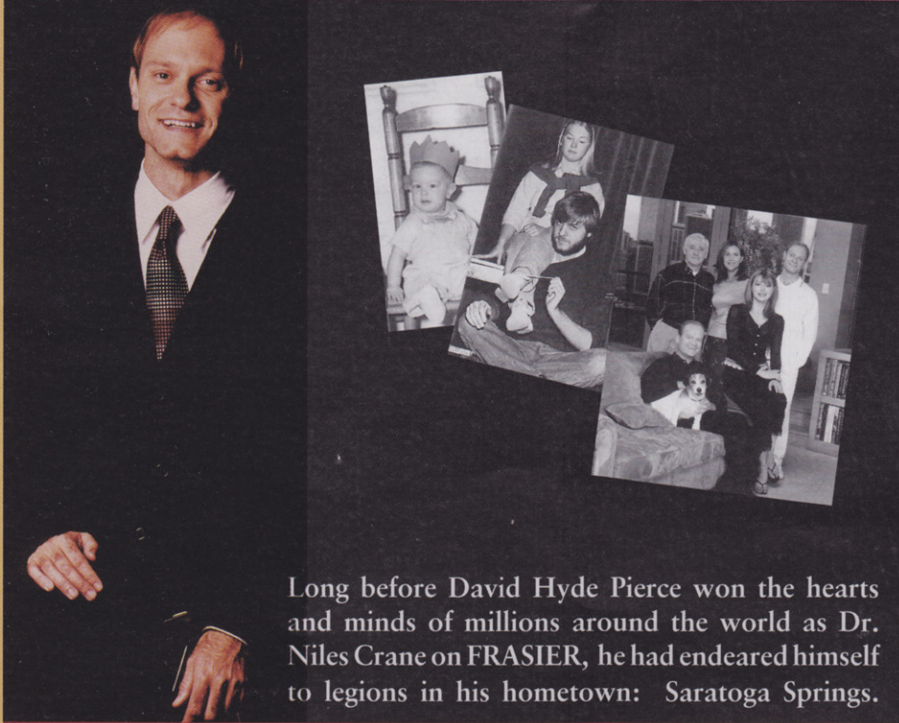
HOW THE  
WHOLE  
WORLD  
BECAME  
HIS STAGE

An exclusive interview  
with the FRASIER  
co-star who's been  
a hard act to follow  
since his boyhood  
days in The Spa City.





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Saratoga County Living showcases "the faces behind the places" that make this a fascinating area in which to live, work, laugh and play all year long. Published by Grove Communications, the magazine is designed to enlighten and entertain county residents and business people as well as those who grace the region with their presence as college students, convention delegates, tourists or while in the service of the United States Armed Forces. Editorial submissions and advertisements are welcome; however, the publisher reserves the right to decline to publish unsolicited materials for any reason. While we cannot assume responsibility for loss or damage, all materials will be treated with care. Kindly enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with each submission. All correspondence should be addressed to: P.O. Box 99, Middle Grove, N. Y. 12850. Tel. 518-580-0413. E-mail: countyliving@spa.net. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. Copyright© 2000.

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A portrait of actor David Hyde Pierce. He is wearing a white button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up and glasses. He is smiling and has his hands clasped in front of him. The background is dark with some blurred lights.

*Always  
a class  
act!*

PORTRAIT OF DAVID HYDE PIERCE  
BY STOCK STUDIOS PHOTOGRAPHY





Emmy award-winning actor David Hyde Pierce with beloved sisters Nancy (left) and Barbara.  
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ROSE M. PROUSER.



# DAVID HYDE PIERCE

HOW THE  
WHOLE  
WORLD  
BECAME  
HIS STAGE



David Hyde Pierce with FRASIER co-stars Kelsey Grammer, John Mahoney, Peri Gilpin, Jane Leeves and "Moose" -- better known to viewers as Eddie.

By ANN HAUPRICH

Long before David Hyde Pierce won the hearts and minds of millions around the world as Dr. Niles Crane on the hit sit-com FRASIER, he had endeared himself to legions in his hometown: Saratoga Springs. Those who knew the award-winning actor in his youth recall they were as captivated with his graciousness and humility as they were with his wry wit and incredible sense of comic timing. All agree that the true measure of the star's success is that he remains as thoughtful, unpretentious and genuinely caring as ever.

"David always was within himself a fine, fine person. I don't think he ever uttered a cross word to anyone," reminisces Flora Clements, who taught the performer when he was a fourth grader at Caroline Street School, a stone's throw from his boyhood home on Saratoga's Fifth Avenue.

"Of course, he came from an honorable family. His parents (the late George and Laura Pierce) were absolutely wonderful people and there's no doubt that David and his siblings enjoyed a warm and loving home life. It was easy for anyone to see that he was a well brought up young man, but David had other qualities that made him even more special. Everyone just loved to be around him."

For starters, Mrs. Clements says, young David was creative, resourceful and unusually thoughtful. "He was quiet, but he was also a great contributor . . . he always did far more than was expected of him yet he never expected to receive anything extra in return." And when it came to delivering oral reports, one might say David was in a class by himself.



A STAR IS BORN





*"There's no doubt that David and his siblings enjoyed a warm and loving home life. It was easy for anyone to see that he was a well brought up young man, but David had other qualities that made him even more special . . ."*



-- TEACHER FLORA CLEMENTS

"We used to assign 10 extra words, often from science and social studies lessons, to our best spellers each week and these students were expected to write a story using the more difficult vocabulary words. Well, it got to the point where we saved David's creations till last because they were so good that the class didn't want him to rush. Sometimes he'd do accents or surprise us by cleverly positioning a moustache on his upper lip while his back was momentarily turned to the class. We never knew what to expect next!"

What impressed Mrs. Clements most was that upon completing a magnificent performance, David "would quietly return to his seat wearing that same deadpan expression he uses on FRASIER. He was so unassuming that I thought he simply wasn't comfortable being in the spotlight."

For his part, David credits Mrs. Clements with encouraging him to broaden both his literary and theatrical horizons. "Mrs. Clements was great," David told Saratoga County Living during a recent telephone interview from California. "She let us tackle projects involving our special interests. I used to write plays for me and my friends to perform in front of the class, but a book I found in the school library in the fourth grade signalled a definite turning point. It contained a collection of Shakespearean plays edited for children. One was *Julius Caesar*, and I just fell in love with it because I got to die in front of the whole class."

In fact, David began making the whole world his stage from an incredibly early age. His dramatic debut was actually in the comfort of the suburban home he shared with his parents and older siblings Tom, Nancy and Barbara.

"I used to practice falling down the stairs and dying which sometimes annoyed my brother and sisters. They'd say things like: "Hey, how come we had to wash and dry dishes after supper and David gets to clown around?" (The answer, according to David, has to do with the installation of an automatic dishwasher which freed the youngest Pierce to perfect his free-falls.) Still, no one in the Pierce household -- David included -- could have possibly imagined that all those falls would eventually help lead to his big break on FRASIER!

"The part of Dr. Niles Crane requires me to do a lot of physical comedy, like falling, and the fact that I'm able to do it so effortlessly has come in quite handy," muses David.

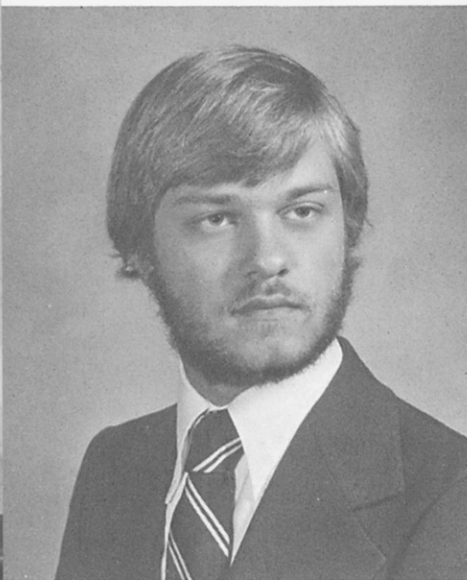
Music and theater played important roles in David's life from an early age, thanks to his parents, Laura and George Pierce. Piano teacher Edith Stonequist (below) was to earn an especially dear place in the young performer's heart. Among those David continues to enjoy accompanying is his brother Tom (on cello).







Displaying star quality at an early age, "Prince David" was clearly loved by his older brother Tom and sisters Nancy and Barbara. As he matured, David increasingly showed a flair for the dramatic -- whether "playing dead" on his parents stairs or disguised as Von Hindenburg for a Caroline Street Elementary School project. (The distinguished-looking moustache and beard in his Saratoga High portrait are real.) PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PIERCE FAMILY.





*David's late grandfather, Arthur J. Pierce (right) was a highly respected Saratoga businessman whose first love was acting! The same was true of David's father, George Hyde Pierce, who frequently performed with The Spa City's legendary Town Hall Players.*



# Star Quality.



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There is no doubt, insists David, where he got his physical comedy talents.

"My Dad was best known in Saratoga for running the George Pierce Insurance Agency, which he took over from my grandfather, Arthur J. Pierce. But my father's true love was acting. His dream as a young man was to study acting at college. However, jobs in that field were scarce during the Depression, and he was persuaded to join the family insurance business instead." It was there that David's parents met and the rest, as they say, is history.

Although George Pierce never became a full-time, professional actor he performed widely on stages in and around the Saratoga area, generating rave reviews in the process. Some of his most notable performances were given as part of the legendary Town Hall Players.

Among the most important lessons passed along to David by his father was the importance of giving one's finest performance whether or not the audience count is of epic proportions. "Dad demonstrated a genuine love of the theater that is with me to this day. The real reward in acting comes from within -- knowing that you've done your best . . . given your all."

Another person who had a profound influence on David's early life was the late Edith Stonequist, who gave the actor his first piano lessons -- and also contributed to his harmonious outlook on life. It didn't matter to Edith if a student was exceedingly gifted or not especially gifted as a piano player; she instilled in each of us a lifelong love of music," reflects David, quickly adding that her particular brand of humor left a lasting impression.

Young David also got a kick out of the fact



that the European-born and bred private tutor, whose husband was president of Skidmore College, was a huge Mets fan. "She loved the Mets and if a piano lesson happened to land during baseball season, Edith would pretend to listen, but you knew she was absorbed in the game." In short, Edith showed David that it was A-OK to cultivate diverse interests.

Although she passed on several years ago, David says his former piano instructor remains "a vital part" of his daily life. "Edith often recommended a piano manufactured by Bluthner as a fine instrument ... when I found a Bluthner in L.A. a few years ago, I immediately thought of Edith and bought the piano (which) I play every day. And when I do, I think of her. In that way, Edith is still with me every day."

Saratoga Springs music teacher Jeffrey Vredenburg is another who recognized and encouraged David's early talents.

"Jeff had a significant role to play when I was in junior high. Phys Ed was not exactly my best subject and as it was highly unlikely I would ever be recruited to play pro-football, I would sometimes sneak away from the gym and head for a little rehearsal hall that had a piano," confesses David.

"Jeff caught me there one day, and to this day I thank my lucky stars that he didn't say: *What are you doing in here? Aren't you supposed to be some place else?* Instead he told me he thought I had talent and encouraged me to come back and play as often as I could. He even asked me if I would consider playing in his choir. Having someone like him acknowledge my talent and then giving me an opportunity to perform before my peers was a very important step. I sometimes think how differently my life might have turned out if another teacher had happened by that day and either ignored me completely or ordered me to get up from the piano and leave."

Now the director of the Saratoga Springs High School Choruses, Vredenburg vividly recalls his first meeting with the globally-acclaimed actor.

"I came across David playing a piece on the rehearsal hall piano and was enormously impressed by what I heard. It was clear he had great ability," says Vredenburg, adding that David went on to wow audiences by performing *The Choral Fantasy*--an extremely challenging piece by Beethoven. "*The Choral Fantasy* is a piece composed for orchestra and piano in which the first 20 minutes consisted of David performing solo with a chorus joining at the end. It was very exciting."

Vredenburg admits he was surprised at first when he learned that David, who was accepted as a music student at Yale, switched his major to acting. "I know his parents were worried that he might have a tough time making a living



**Voted most talented and most likely to succeed by the Class of 1977, David Hyde Pierce credits Saratoga Springs Junior-Senior High School chorus director Jeffrey Vredenburg and theater arts teacher Nadine Stah with encouraging him to develop his talents as a performing artist. David was also awarded the Yaddo Medal -- an honor to be detailed in our Summer 2001 edition. With the actor above is former classmate Tamara Millis.**





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Benjamin Van Wye, Director of the Saratoga Chamber Singers (left), had teenaged David as an organ pupil and was immediately impressed not only by the lad's talent, but also by his engaging personality. The bond between the two strengthened during the years when David provided keyboard accompaniment for the Chamber ensemble. Even as an adolescent, David displayed an "uncommon musical and social sophistication."



PORTRAIT OF BENJAMIN VAN WYE  
COURTESY EMMA DODGE HANSON.

in theater, but they were always a tight, very close, family unit and they were supportive of his decision and were proud of everything he did as an actor starting with his summer stock performances."

"I don't see David that often now that the family home in Saratoga has been sold, but whenever he's in town, he stops by and says hello. Even though he is internationally famous, David remains close to his roots. He has followed the example set by his parents . . . he is still as warm, as friendly, as funny -- and as humble -- as ever."

Similar sentiments are expressed by Benjamin Van Wye, director of the Saratoga Chamber Singers, who became acquainted musically and socially with David when the lad signed on as one of his organ pupils.

"I think David was in his early high school years and he immediately struck me as a tremendously engaging, clever and quite precocious, young man," recalls Van Wye with obvious affection. Van Wye, then organist and music director of Bethesda Episcopal Church (regularly attended by the entire Pierce family), was busy forming and directing the church choir, an elite vocal ensemble that was later to become the Saratoga Chamber Singers.

"David was immediately drawn to this group of bright, talented musicians and frequently performed as keyboard accompanist during his later high school and early college days . . . for their part, the Chamber Singers admired David's uncommon musical and social sophistication."

"Even after his visits to Saratoga became

necessarily brief and restricted, we all followed his career with pride although not astonishment, for even as a young man, David had been immensely entertaining and displayed a wonderfully wry sense of humor coupled with an uncanny grasp of the inherent comedy in the human condition. In those and other ways, David Hyde Pierce IS that character, Dr. Niles Crane, he portrays on television."

The fact that David Hyde Pierce cherishes the arts and music at every level further endears him to Van Wye, who through the years has remained in touch with his student-turned-celebrity and who last saw David when he directed the Saratoga Chamber Singers in a production of Gilbert & Sullivan's "Trial By Jury" at Skidmore College in which the Emmy-award-winning actor played the eccentric Judge. (See photos pages 16 and 17.)

"It is a part requiring careful enunciation and timing and, of course, he pulled it off magnificently. It was a happy reunion, not just with the Chamber Singers, but also with members of his family. We would all love nothing more than to do something with David again, though we certainly understand that his schedule might make it difficult to do so.





## *The way we were . . .*

David Hyde Pierce was a teenager attending public schools in Saratoga when photographer Antonio Bucca snapped these snow-covered scenes of Broadway back in the 1970s. The picture at right shows the mini-mall that once stood where the posh new Roohan professional building complex is today. Clearly visible in the background is Woodlawn Avenue, where Gormley-Wise Personal Insurance (formerly Pierce, Pratt & Brown) has offices. To secure these historic winter photos, Bucca took to nearby rooftops. His tripod rested above the Collamer Building next to City Hall while shooting the top picture. Bucca moved his camera equipment to the Walbridge Building on Caroline Street one cold New Year's Eve in order to get a clear shot of the festively decorated mini-mall.





# Actor seeks happier endings for lives touched by AIDS, Alzheimer's Disease

*"There are places in the heart which do not yet exist.*

*Suffering must enter before these places come to be.*

*This creativity of suffering applies not only to the one who suffers, but also to those who seek to lessen the suffering . . ."*

-- Author unknown

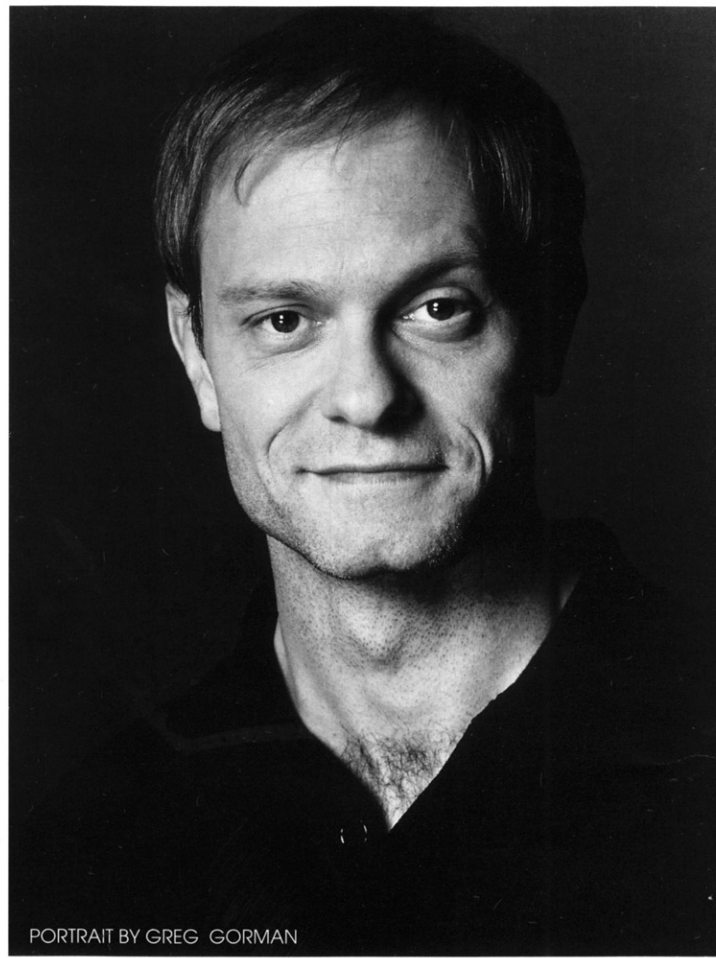
There is no script for the part David Hyde Pierce plays as a member of the board of directors of the American Alzheimer's Association.

Anything the celebrated actor says on their behalf comes straight from the heart, inspired by painful memories of the toll the debilitating brain disease took on the lives of his own father and grandfather -- and their devoted caregivers.

Easing the suffering of those afflicted with the illness -- for which there is no known cure -- is something David hopes to accomplish through his affiliation with the national association. It is certainly one for which he will be remembered by the loved ones of those struggling with the widespread affliction.

For as David testified before Congress, witnessing the mental deterioration of an Alzheimer's patient is devastating -- both emotionally and physically -- for family members. Sharing from his family's personal experiences, the celebrated actor petitioned the Congress to invest more heavily in Alzheimer's research.

"I was trying to think of a way to explain to you how awful that was . . . when I had the terrible realization that Alzheimer's is becoming so widespread, the chances are that you know someone who is struggling with the disease," he told Congress. An estimated 12 million people



PORTRAIT BY GREG GORMAN

(about a third of them in the USA) have Alzheimer's which causes plaque and tangles to develop in the brain, killing nerve cells that lead to dementia and other problems.

"One of the reasons we need so much funding," David told an interviewer, "is that clinical (drug) trials take five years each, and we need to be able to run multiple trials at the same time. Otherwise, by the time we do get to find a cure, it may be too late in terms of the huge numbers of people that will be coming down with the disease as our population ages."

Among the ways the Saratoga Springs native helps to raise awareness of Alzheimer's issues is through the annual Memory Walk, which takes place in more than 400 cities across the nation each fall. While David's hectic schedule did not permit him to return to his hometown for the most recent walkathon, he hopes to be here for the city's Fifth Annual Memory Walk in October 2001.

Whether or not he can fly in from California depends on a number of factors, however, David vowed: "I will do all I can to be there."

*"I got involved in AIDS awareness back in the early 80s in New York. I had friends and colleagues dying of the disease and couldn't believe how slow the government was to recognize the crisis. Back then it was hard to get people to care because most of the victims of AIDS -- gay people, IV drug users -- were somehow seen as either marginal or expendable. Now, although we have some pretty advanced treatments in the US, we still don't have a cure. And the new population in crisis -- people in Africa, in India, in southeast Asia -- once again these are the groups that Americans can marginalize or ignore. But AIDS is like Alzheimer's -- it's not about "them" because "them" is us." David Hyde Pierce*



# Rotarian George Hyde Pierce epitomized organization's "Service above self" motto

On August 19, 1942, George Hyde Pierce had the distinction of being recognized as the first member of the Rotary Club of Saratoga Springs to take a leave of absence from his community service work in order to serve his country in the military during World War II. In bidding a fond farewell on behalf of the membership, club records show that congregational minister Rev. George Brock impressed upon Mr. Pierce that he was held in exceedingly high regard by his fellow Rotarians. As part of his farewell message in which he expressed hope for Mr. Pierce's safe return, the clergyman chose to quote the advice from Polonius to his son Laertes in Shakespeare's Hamlet: *"To thine own self be true and it must follow as the night the day thou canst not then be false to any man."*

It was a verse George Pierce clearly took to heart and passed along through example to his four children as well as to members of the Rotary Club that was to be a second family to him for another half century following his honorable discharge from the Army.

Although George died in February of 1998 at the age of 87, his legacy is very much alive in the community where he exemplified Rotary International's "Service above self" motto. The first instance of note occurred during the Depression years when George put his dreams of becoming an actor in New York City on hold in order to help out at the Saratoga insurance business owned by his father, Arthur J. Pierce.

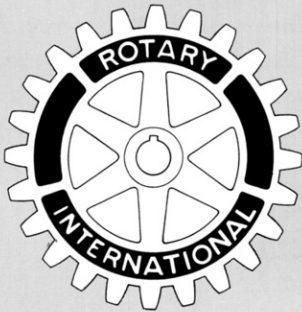
In a series of events rivaling those in the classic Jimmy Stewart film, *A Wonderful Life*, George wound up staying in The Spa City, marrying and raising a family -- eventually assuming the helm of his father's small, but thriving, insurance company that became known as Pierce, Pratt & Brown. (The business was sold to Matthew Gormley in 1984, but George continued to work there until around 1990.)

Although George never made it to the New York stage, son David Hyde Pierce insists his beloved father "was a performer all his life" -- as a magician and an actor with the Town Hall Players, on the ski slopes, on the tennis court and, most perhaps memorably, on the dance floor.

His tireless efforts on behalf of Rotary began with his induction into the local club in 1938 and culminated with his being honored as a Paul Harris Fellow in 1996. During that same half century, George Hyde Pierce also served the local community with devotion on behalf of the Bethesda Episcopal Church, the Boy Scouts, Greenwich Cemetery and the Saratoga Hospital.

"He was an absolutely wonderful man, an inspiration and a real sparkplug," recalls longtime Saratoga Rotarian Hal Gerow. "George had a way of making everyone feel at ease. It didn't matter whether you were a newcomer or if he'd known you for years, you

## A Paul Harris Fellow



The presentation of a Paul Harris Fellow is The Rotary Foundation's way of expressing its appreciation for a substantial contribution to humanitarian and educational programs. Rotarians often designate a Paul Harris Fellow, named in honor of the founder of Rotary International, as a tribute to an individual whose life demonstrates a shared purpose with the objectives of Rotary. The emblems of appreciation presented to a Paul Harris Fellow serve as reminders of the common goals of world peace, understanding and goodwill.

just felt George was someone you could talk to and trust. He was polite and genteel, yet also extremely outgoing. If there was fun to be had, you could be sure George was one of the instigators or in the middle of it. He was a real mover and shaker without ever being rambunctious."

Only on the dance floor did the father of actor David Hyde Pierce let fellow Rotarians catch a glimpse of his show biz side.

"We affectionately called him Twinkle Toes," laughs Gerow, "because he was a great dancer and you couldn't get him to sit down once the music started playing. He was dynamic! His wife Laura was wonderful, too. You just enjoyed being around them because they were so positive and friendly."

Gerow also credits George with energizing Rotary Club meetings, fund-raisers and community outreach projects. "You could always count on George to volunteer. No matter how busy he was, he somehow found the time to go where he was needed and do what needed doing with enthusiasm. For instance,

he was one of the pioneers of the home show. I can't tell you how many hours he spent standing on the floor of the Old Armory welcoming visitors. That's a huge annual event in the city now, but it started with just a few dedicated individuals -- George being among those who was especially generous with his time."

No wonder his son David cherishes so highly the honor bestowed upon him at the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Rotary Club of Saratoga Springs in 1999.

By all accounts, there wasn't a dry eye in the room as David gave an emotional acceptance speech acknowledging the special Paul Harris Fellow awarded in recognition of his own shining example of a wonderful life that places "Service above self."

David told Saratoga Rotarians that of all the awards he had received, the Paul Harris Fellow was most dear to his heart "because it is the only one I share with my father."

-- Ann Hauprich



# Pierce siblings all reflected positively on parents

*No ones needs to preach to the Rev. Thomas Parke about the virtues of David Hyde Pierce. Over the past 30 years, the actor and the pastor of Bethesda Episcopal Church in Saratoga Springs have weathered some of the most glorious and most heart-wrenching of times and are quick to sing one another's praises.*

"Father Parke has helped us through weddings, funerals and everything in between. He's certainly been a strong and positive influence on my life," says David of his long-time family friend.

Responding to this tribute, Father Parke observes: "The Pierces -- George, Laura and all four of their children -- were a very dear and faithful family who enriched the church family and were, in turn, enriched by it. Each participated and contributed so much in so many ways . . . the children reflected both the discipline and the joy of their home life . . . George and Laura raised four children of exceptional personal character and achievement," states Father Parke.

All of the Pierce children received the distinguished Yaddo Medal upon their respective graduations from Saratoga Springs High School, notes the priest. Success stories could be written about each of them, he adds.

What other qualities does the priest think David got from his parents? "Laura was a

voracious reader who was there for her children during their formative years. I think David's love of literature came from her. George was the classic image of an insurance man, highly respected for his professionalism in the community. But there was another side of him -- a wonderfully funny, much lighter, side -- that I first saw when George did a parish dinner many years ago. The sense of humor, that desire to perform, I think, came from the father."

"David was a particularly gifted musician and was quite sought after as an accompanist in

those days. He was someone who could be counted upon to do his work reliably and cheerfully. There was a quiet strength to go with his quiet sense of humor. To this day, David is someone you can trust and count on . . . some people, when they reach the level of fame and fortune that David has, forget where they came from. Not David. He's still a great supporter of Saratoga. If we're lucky, maybe he'll move back here after he retires. He's the kind of person who could pull it off. He's absolutely genuine."

## "The apple didn't fall far from the tree"

*George H. Pierce could not have chosen better when he selected Matthew Gormley to assume his share in the Saratoga insurance business founded in 1927 by his late father, Arthur J. Pierce. Indeed two famous lines from Shakespeare come to mind when contemplating the legacy of the company now called Gormley-Wise Personal Insurance. Calling a rose (or an insurance business) by a new name does not change what it is -- provided the new management remains true to the principles handed down by the firm's predecessors.*

That is precisely what Gormley has done, and in so doing, helps to keep the memory of actor David Hyde Pierce's father alive.

"When I think of George and David, the adage about the apple not falling far from the tree comes to mind. George was the ultimate gentleman, his manners were marvelous . . . I never once saw him flustered and he made everyone around him feel at ease. He also had this amazing wit and I remember feeling such an incredible sense of loss when he died, thinking: *No one will ever be able to replace him.* Of course, that's true. George was irreplaceable. And yet, the older David gets, the more he reminds me of his father and I say to myself: *No one will ever replace George, but David is sure a close second!*"

Gormley is quick to add that all four of the children of George and Laura Pierce have become shining stars in their own right.

"Tom, Barbara and Nancy have all gone on to do wonderful things with their lives, and I know each of them made their parents very proud. Of course, David is the one we hear the most about and I often think what a positive reflection it is on George and Laura that despite all the craziness that sometimes goes on in Hollywood, he has remained true to his family values. Despite his fame and fortune, David's feet remain solidly on the ground."



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# Actor would have made great teacher: Sarno



Dee Sarno, executive director of the Saratoga County Arts Council, believes there are other reasons why David Hyde Pierce hasn't let superstardom go to his head.

She believes one of the things that has kept David so genuinely humble ("there is no ego there whatsoever," she insists) is that "he views his talent as a God-given gift."

Even so, Sarno insists, not everyone can bring such talent to fruition. David, she is convinced, has just made it look easy.

"David doesn't need a stage to shine; he lights up any area he's in. You feel a vibrancy when he's around . . . and I can tell you from years in theatrical circles that not many actors have that effect when they're off stage. David is the ultimate tour de force. Had he become a teacher, David would have made another wonderful contribution to the world. He would have made all of the students in his classroom feelempowered about their capabilities."

Sarno says the celebrated actor has a way of making others feel that they, too, can be funny -- or profound -- or whatever they yearn to be.

"To be in the same room with David Hyde Pierce is sheer joy," muses Sarno, who last saw the actor perform live three years ago when he lent his talents to an arts council benefit at Skidmore College. "His generosity of heart and spirit is genuine. He has an innate wit that is infectious. David brings out the best in others around him and that's a rare and wonderful quality."

Another quality Sarno deeply admires in David is his incredible sense of family, both his own and the community.

**JUDGEMENT IS RENDERED:** It was a night to remember when David Hyde Pierce returned to his Spa City roots to perform in a Saratoga County Arts Council benefit at Skidmore College a few years back. The celebrated actor stole the show as The Learned Judge in the production of Gilbert & Sullivan's "Trial By Jury." Saratoga County Arts Council Executive Director Dee Sarno and daughter Dina Sarno Slawson were among those who had the pleasure of David's company at a party that followed the landmark performance. TOP LEFT PHOTO BY SHARON BOYD; OTHERS COURTESY OF STOCK STUDIOS.

"He loves the Saratoga Chamber Singers led by Ben Van Wye and performed with them in his youth. The Chamber Singers are one of the premiere groups in the area performing the type of music local audiences normally don't get to hear too often. David respects that talent and is wonderful about vocalizing that admiration. By continuing to share so graciously of his time, energy and talents with the local community and applauding the work of performers at the community level, David does the grassroots artists and audiences a great service."

**At last count, David Hyde Pierce had been honored with three Emmys, five American Comedy Awards, five Viewers for Quality Television Awards, a pair of Screen Actors Guild Awards, a Television Critics Association Award, a TV Guide Magazine Award and a National Humor Treasure Award. How does it feel to be so greatly admired and respected? "While I'm proud (to receive such honors), I also know that acting is not a sport that can be measured like horse racing or shot putting. The awards, like the income, are unexpected gifts -- although I'd hate to part with them, they are not the reason I act," the Saratoga native insists.**





*While aware that he's almost certainly destined to be best remembered for his many award-winning television performances as Dr. Niles Crane, David insists that he is no more or less happy now than in the early days when he was performing for little -- or, in some cases, no -- money and significantly smaller audiences.*

*He fondly recalls the summer before his graduation when he relied heavily on peanut butter crackers for nourishment while performing at the Williamstown Festival surrounded by "some of the best and most generous actors in the business" including Christopher Reeve, Ed Hermann and Blythe Danner.*

*"Williamstown was my first taste of what professional theatre was like . . . we did Chekov, Gorky, Shaw, Shakespeare. That's where I learned that if you believe in the writing, and you work with great actors, then the experience will be a success -- whether or not the production is. That has stuck with me throughout my career. From Kevin Kline in Hamlet in New York City to Anthony Hopkins in the film Nixon, and every project in between, I try to work with the best people on the best material. The satisfaction, the joy, the pride still comes from doing a good job in the company of people you respect and admire," insists David, seen at right performing at a 1998 Saratoga County Arts Council benefit at Skidmore College.*

Still described as having "boyish" good looks at 41, David Hyde Pierce is about as in demand as a Hollywood actor gets these days .

Much of his summer break from FRASIER was spent filming "Hot, Wet American Summer" in Pennsylvania. Other works-in-progress include doing voice-overs for two exciting new Disney animations: "Treasure Planet" and "Osmosis Jones." Those eager to catch a glimpse of David in roles far removed from the character of Dr. Niles Crane should also be on the lookout for the Saratoga native as Mr. Kerner in "Chain of Fools" and as Michael Hastings in "Isn't She Great?" with Bette Midler.

In 1999, David provided the narrator's voice for "Mating Habits of the Earthbound Human" (with Carmen Electra) and also portrayed Perry, a deaf rehearsal pianist, in the made-for-TV movie "Jackie's Back: Portrait of a Diva." The previous year, David captivated children of all ages as the voice of Slim, the articulate animated walking stick in "A Bug's Life." Prior to that, he wowed audiences with his riveting performance as John Dean alongside Anthony Hopkins in the title role of Oliver Stone's critically acclaimed "Nixon."

Yet another dimension of David's acting abilities surfaced when he filled the bill as Dennis Reed (Meg Ryan's on screen brother) in the now classic romantic comedy "Sleepless in Seattle."

David's prime time television appearances, meanwhile, go as far back as 1985 when he played a character called O'Neill in an episode of "Spenser: For Hire" and when he created the voice of Cecil Terwillinger for "The Simpsons."

By 1995, when he was better known to home viewing audiences as psychiatrist Dr. Niles Crane, David hammed it up for a special anniversary spoof sketch of "Star Trek: Voyager." He also appeared as an IRS auditor who wanted to be in CATS in an episode of "Caroline in the City."

All of which begs the question: When and how did David land what most would consider that role of a lifetime on FRASIER?

It was, says David, a long and winding road the likes of which he could never have imagined when he strode across the stage at SPAC to accept his diploma from Saratoga Springs Senior High School in June of 1977.

The decision to switch his major at Yale from music to acting was, well, a major one, but by the time he earned his Bachelor's Degree in Theater Arts in 1981, many were predicting it was not a matter of *if* -- but rather *when* -- the glad grad known simply as David Hyde would make the whole world his stage. (Hyde, his grandmother's maiden name, was added later to avoid confusion with another actor named David Pierce.)

Degree in hand, David promptly headed for New York City, where he landed a job selling

ties at Bloomingdale's while continuing his quest to grow as an actor. His first lesson: There's no such thing as a "big break" or an over night success -- nor, believes David, should there be.

"I spent 10 years in New York theaters and a variety of summer stock productions and there are just so many plays I'm proud of having been involved in. I vividly remember thinking when I was cast in Beyond Therapy, my first play on Broadway, *It can't get any better than this!* Then in 1990, I traveled to Russia and Japan to perform in the stage production of The Cherry Orchard with one of the great directors in western theater. Once again I said to myself: *This is as good as it gets!* Next came The Heidi Chronicles, a truly great Broadway production with an outstanding cast, and again I was convinced I could now die a happy man. I could not imagine it ever getting better . . ."

Then along came a new sit-com called FRASIER. The role of Frasier's younger brother Niles was created especially for David because of his uncanny resemblance to the show's star, Kelsey Grammer, and the two enjoy a close relationship off-camera as well as on.

In real life, however, it's David's older brother Tom and two older sisters who keep him grounded. "They're very good at making sure one doesn't get an inflated view of one's worth," he quips.





*"I can see why David made it . . . he is an incredibly powerful soul with a gracious aura. When he moves, everyone in the room moves with him. Even if he had not skyrocketed to the top in show biz, David Hyde Pierce would still be a great man. Yes, he has been blessed with amazing talents, but it is the man himself who is great . . . who he is as a human being is what truly sets him above the crowd."*

-- Cole Broderick



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Although he did not meet David Hyde Pierce until a few years ago, Saratoga composer Cole Broderick instantly noticed that the actor radiates a star quality which transcends the glamour and glitz of Hollywood.

Reminiscing about their introduction at a party following David's performance in an arts council benefit at Skidmore College, Broderick, whose newest CD (*Zone*) is due out this winter, says he was completely overwhelmed by the star's graciousness.

"I was there with my *Autumn in Saratoga* CD (now part of a four-CD box set) and David said something like 'Hey everybody, look at this CD. This is great!' I'll never get over how he turned the spotlight away from himself and made it shine on me. I mean everyone was there to see and be seen with David Hyde Pierce. He was definitely the center of attraction, but he did his best to draw their attention to me. His graciousness was so spontaneous and at the same time so sincere, it just blew me away!"

Broderick says David made a second unexpected gesture when he penned a note thanking him for sending the final installment of the *Seasons* CD collection. "I went to my mailbox and there was a handwritten note from David Hyde Pierce. I couldn't believe that as busy as he is, David took the time to write me," beams Broderick.

Included was a passage in which the actor paid tribute to Broderick's *Seasons* CD. It read: "The jazz is as cool as it is hot -- obviously Saratoga has a good influence on all aspects of the arts, from dance to theater, from Balanchine to Broderick."

It was, the composer/pianist notes, one of the grandest compliments he's ever received. "I respect and admire David's own musical abilities so much. It just means the world to have him say something so nice."



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# Frasier co-star a man for all seasons!

Some of the warmest memories David Hyde Pierce has of his youth involve snowy winter days in Saratoga.

"My Dad had been in the ski troops during World War Two and so it was nothing for him to take my brother and sisters and I out on the slopes or cross-country ski trails -- a favorite setting being on the golf course near the Avenue of the Pines in the Spa State Park. In her younger years, Mom would join us, but later on, when she was no longer up to a day on skis, one of my fondest memories was coming home to the wonderful aroma of her spaghetti sauce simmering on the stove," recalls David.

Mary Sylvester, a woman who worked in Dad's insurance office, had given Mom her recipe for the sauce and meatballs and the aroma just filled the house. We'd sit down for dinner together like a big, happy Italian family -- savoring Mom's spaghetti served with Italian bread. I've had the pleasure of dining in many fine Italian restaurants since, but can honestly say I've never sampled anything better than what my mother prepared in our kitchen on Fifth Avenue in Saratoga."

While David still enjoys skiing, the fact that he now resides in southern California means he isn't able to take to the slopes or trails as often as he'd like. And while David doesn't miss raking autumn leaves any more than he does shovelling snow or chopping ice on the sidewalk outside his spacious boyhood residence on Saratoga's east side, he does miss the fragrance of the freshly fallen foliage. "I certainly miss the beautiful colors, but what I miss even more was the way everything smelled outdoors. The fragrance was wonderful. There's nothing that even comes close to it in Hollywood." (Not even Daphne's hair?)

Special Springtime memories are rooted in his mother's cherished forsythia bush in the front yard. "It bloomed bright yellow and each Spring, Mom would get so excited at the sight of the first buds. There were also some azaleas I remember being especially lovely."

Interestingly, David doesn't have as many sentimental connections to Saratoga during the sunniest of the four seasons. "We as a family used to skip Saratoga during the summer," chuckles David. "We'd rent our house out to tourists (here for the races) and use the money to go to Lake

George or Cape Cod where we'd rent a cottage and live until things returned to normal in Saratoga."

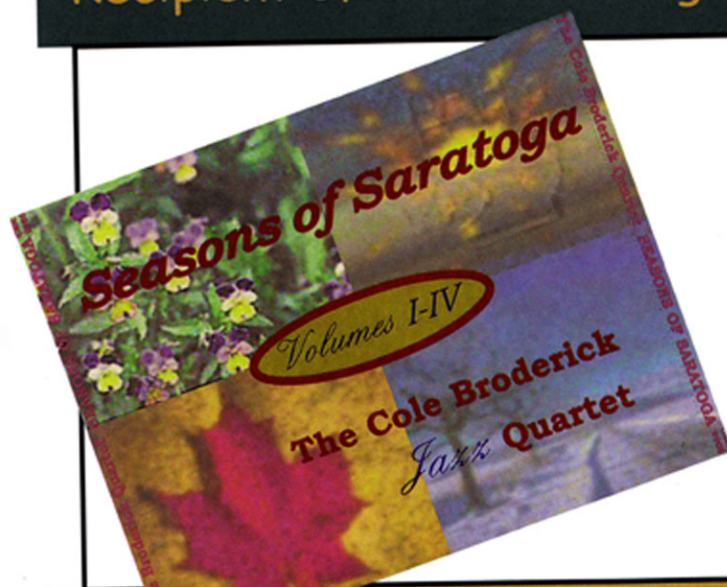
Fleeing The Spa City for a few weeks during July and August did not, however, prevent David from being captivated by the community's diverse cultural offerings in settings ranging from Yaddo to Skidmore College to the Saratoga Performing Arts Center.

"The first time I ever saw Steve Martin perform was at SPAC," recalls David, who vividly recalls the thrills and chills of being a lawn ticket patron. (He later worked briefly as a SPAC security guard, though he jokes that crowd control wasn't much of an issue during performances by the New York City Ballet Company and the Philadelphia Philharmonic Orchestra.)

"Growing up in Saratoga, I took it for granted that world-class entertainers came to town each summer. Looking back I realize how very fortunate I was to spend my youth in a community that offered the best of small town America with all of the cultural benefits of a big city," says David.

"The quality of the arts in Saratoga had a huge effect on my future. I'm talking here not just about professional performers, but also about several exceptional teachers I had over the years. What a far-reaching effect those teachers have had on my life! They may not know it, but they laid the groundwork for the success I now enjoy as part of the cast of FRASIER . . . I am mindful of where I came from and I take my commitment to the arts at the community level very seriously."

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