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## DeMolay Celebrates Walt Disney's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday

Walt Disney—an icon for generations, a man with a vision, a self-made success who built an empire with his drawings was first a DeMolay.

Walt Disney was born on December 5, 1901, in Chicago. His family moved to Marceline, Missouri, when he was a child. He spent most of his boyhood on a farm, where he often sketched illustrations of the animals. Later, the family moved to Kansas City, where he attended Benton Grammar School.

Disney took up a number of odd jobs to help support the family, including keeping a paper route for six years. At the age of fifteen, he dropped out of school and got a job on the train run between Chicago and Kansas City as a “news butch”, selling candy and magazines.

By the fall of 1917, World War I was in full-force. Disney felt his patriotic duty calling him to join the war effort. He tried to join, but at age sixteen, both the Army and the Navy turned him down.

Determined to help, Disney traveled to France and became an ambulance driver for the Red Cross. Ever the vigilant artist, Disney's ambulance was not decorated with the usual camouflage, but with his original drawings.

When Disney returned to Kansas City in 1918, he became an artist, working with a Kansas City advertising company. Young Disney joined DeMolay in 1920, as the 107<sup>th</sup> member of the original Mother Chapter of DeMolay in Kansas City, Missouri. He was 19 years old. Disney was known by his brothers to be an extremely imaginative and hardworking member.

“I feel a great sense of obligation and gratitude toward DeMolay for the important part it has played in shaping my life,” Disney said. “Its precepts have been invaluable in making decisions, facing dilemmas and crises, holding on to the face and ideals, and meeting those tests which are borne when shared with others in a bond of confidence.”

It was about this time that Disney became acquainted with a man named Ubbe Iwerks, who remained with him the rest of his life. Also during this time, Disney





organized his own company to do cartoons for advertisements used in the theatres between movies. It was here that Ubbe Iwerks and Disney spent most of their time working.

Once Disney decided to make cartooning his profession, he traveled back to Chicago to attend the Chicago Academy of Art in the evenings while working days. After several years, Disney moved to Hollywood.

In Hollywood, Disney formed a small company with his brother, Roy. He did a series of film cartoons that he called "Alice in Cartoonland". There

he met Lillian Bounds, who later became Mrs. Disney. Disney was also able to talk Ubbe Iwerks into leaving Kansas City to join him in Hollywood.

During the next ten years Disney experienced more hard times than successes. Although some of Disney's creations attained a degree of success, his cartoons could not be called distinguished by any standards. It was not until sound broke in Hollywood that Disney came into his own, for in action, sound, and later color, Disney had the necessary tools to make his cartoons as he imagined them.



Mickey Mouse was Disney's first, and today, most widely known cartoon character. In his first picture, Mickey, inspired

with the exploits of Charles Lindbergh, went "Plane Crazy." Mickey's first cartoon with sound was "Steamboat Willie."

In 1931, Disney received the DeMolay Legion of Honor Award honoring outstanding achievements. It was in the mid-1930s that Brother Fred Spencer of the Walt Disney Studios began sending DeMolay International a Mickey Mouse comic strip entitled "Mickey Mouse Chapter" for DeMolay's national newsletter.



In 1936, Disney appeared as an honored guest at the first DeMolay Founder's Conference in Kansas City. At that time, he gave his first-ever public address. In his address, he spoke about how much being a DeMolay meant to him.

"DeMolay stands for all that is good for the family and for our country," Disney said.

One success followed another, and before Disney's death in 1966, his small company had expanded to an empire with color, movies, television, and two theme parks. Disney's dream didn't end with his death in 1966. Even today, Disney is one of the most recognized names worldwide, and his empire continues to expand in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. And it all began with a man and a dream ...

As the world celebrates Walt Disney's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, DeMolays everywhere remember and honor Disney as "one of our own."

