



History & Evolution of Tommy Bartlett, Inc. – A Corporate Profile –

Founded in 1948, Tommy Bartlett, Inc. is comprised of the Tommy Bartlett Show and Tommy Bartlett Exploratory. Along with other corporate endeavors, Tommy Bartlett, Inc. has provided quality entertainment and service to millions worldwide.

Founder Tommy Bartlett was in the entertainment business for more than 71 years, beginning his career in the radio broadcast industry at age 13. After many successful years as a broadcaster, Tommy became interested in pursuing a different type of entertainment - show business. In the early 1950s, he created a water-ski and boat show, combining some of the greatest talents in the business.

Taking his show on the road in 1952, Tommy scheduled a stop at the growing vacation area of Wisconsin Dells, Wis. After the Show premiered, the local Chamber of Commerce invited him to make Wisconsin Dells the Bartlett Show's home site. Excited by the opportunity, Tommy secured a location on beautiful Lake Delton and permanently anchored in the Dells the following year. The Show, which was then called the Tommy Bartlett Water Ski & Jumping Boat Thrill Show, became an overnight success.

From its inception, the show evolved into a 90-minute live themed production of high-speed boats, courageous water stunts, and thrilling stage performers. The Tommy Bartlett Show brought entertainers from around the globe together on one stage from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend for a mix of breathtaking feats, dazzling showmanship, and good old-fashioned humor. In addition to the live performances, Tommy introduced a patriotic Entrancing Waters finale to the evening performance, thus adding a new dimension to his brand of family entertainment. For many years, the Tommy Bartlett Show was the only major touring water-ski show in the country. Performances at the New York, Seattle, and San Antonio World's Fairs, are examples of the show's illustrious history.

Upon Bartlett's death in 1998, his long-time business partners Tom and Margaret Diehl, took on full ownership of Tommy Bartlett, Inc. Tom Diehl was the guiding force of the organization for 57 years, before his passing in August 2024. Tom's work at Bartlett's extended to his children, Jill and Jeff, and it became a family business. Now his daughter, Jill Diehl, is president of the organization. Jill grew up on the Show site and worked throughout the decades in various roles, from the early days of summer ticket sales and snack bar work to management positions and executive leadership overseeing all facets of operations.

Tom Diehl was initially hired as Housing and Food manager in 1967, became general manager in 1973, and in 1981, was named president of Tommy Bartlett, Inc. During his first year as president, he directed the expansion of the company by opening Tommy Bartlett's Robot World & Exploratory, a \$2.2 million endeavor. Now called Tommy Bartlett Exploratory, the year-round Interactive Science Center features more than 175 hands-on activities ranging from mind-boggling puzzles using simple blocks to computerized toys that use virtual reality and simulation technologies.

In 1997, the Exploratory acquired a replica of Sputnik I, the first-ever artificial satellite, and an authentic Russian Space Station MIR core module. In 2008, the Exploratory added a replica of a Mercury Space Capsule, representing the United States' first manned spaceship. Visitors can experience space exploration firsthand by visiting these interactive educational exhibits.

In spring 2020, facing uncertainty of crowds gathering due to COVID-19, the Diehls had to make the difficult decision to cancel the Show for the summer season. By September 2020, the Tommy Bartlett Show was permanently closed due to continued pandemic gathering limitations and uncertainty over future travel. The Tommy Bartlett Show remains one of Wisconsin's most beloved classic attractions entertaining over 30 million visitors and performing more than 18,700 shows throughout its history. It was one of the longest running live outdoor entertainment shows of its kind in the world.