



THOMAS M. DIEHL
President & Co-owner
Tommy Bartlett Inc.
1967–2024

Thomas M. Diehl had a 57-year career in leadership of Tommy Bartlett, Inc., including serving as president and co-owner up until his passing on August 29, 2024. Tom was a guiding force of the company's attractions – the flagship Tommy Bartlett Show, which operated from 1952 until it closed in 2020, and the Tommy Bartlett Exploratory. Tom was also a recognized leader in tourism and economic development initiatives both locally and statewide. Through Diehl's innovation, Wisconsin Dells became the Midwest's #1 family vacation destination with more than five million visitors each year.

Tom pioneered efforts that gained national exposure for the area through marketing campaigns for the State of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Dells Visitor & Convention Bureau, and Tommy Bartlett, Inc. One of his most notable efforts was establishing the first local room tax in the state in 1969 and designating that 90 percent of the funds collected go to the Visitor Bureau for promoting the Wisconsin Dells area. This has resulted in an annual Visitor & Convention Bureau budget that has grown from \$200 thousand in 1970 to \$17 million today.

Another major state legislative effort took Tom 10 years to see to fruition. In 1997, the Premier Resort Area Tax legislation was approved, allowing tourist-driven communities like Wisconsin Dells to levy a one-half percent special sales tax specifically for the purpose of developing infrastructure such as sewer, water, and storm water systems. This critical financial support allowed the Dells area to grow beyond its traditional Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day season. Elaborate indoor waterpark resorts were developed, bringing the area much notoriety and the moniker "The Waterpark Capital of the World!®". In 2010, Tom guided efforts to increase the tax to one percent to assist the Dells community in developing sporting facilities, and in 2014, he successfully rallied for an additional one-quarter percent voter-approved increase to help support infrastructure developments in the Village of Lake Delton and City of Wisconsin Dells.

Tom joined the Tommy Bartlett organization in 1967 as manager of Housing and Food Operations. He was promoted to general manager of Tommy Bartlett, Inc. in 1973 and was named its president in 1981. During his first year as president, Tom directed the expansion of the company by opening the \$2.2 million Robot World & Exploratory, now known as the Tommy Bartlett Exploratory. In 1975, Tom and his wife Margaret became partners with Tommy Bartlett in the organization, and with the passing of Bartlett in 1998, they became sole owners of Tommy Bartlett, Inc.

In March 2025, Tom was posthumously presented the Legacy Award by the Wisconsin Department of Tourism for 57 years of dedication to cultivating Wisconsin tourism. In April 2025, he was awarded a Lifetime Contribution Award from the Wisconsin Dells Visitor & Convention Bureau for his lifelong selfless commitment to the economic development, growth, and prosperity of Wisconsin Dells tourism. In 2006, Tom received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the state of Wisconsin for

his vision, leadership, and advancement of the tourism industry. In 2013, the Wisconsin Water Ski Federation inducted Tom into its Hall of Fame for his more than 45 years of contribution to the sport. Tom was named an Amazing Outside Bank Board Director for 2018 by Northwestern Financial Review magazine for his 27 years of work with Bank of Wisconsin Dells.

Tom had a Bachelor of Science from Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration and a Master of Business Administration from the Johnson School at Cornell University with an emphasis in marketing and finance. He was a proud father of two children, Jill and Jeffrey, and a grandfather of seven.

Tom served in leadership positions with a number of professional organizations:

Wisconsin Dells Visitor & Convention Bureau Leadership

- Board President – (1982–1997)
- Board Director – (1974–2024)
- Chair – Marketing Committee (1994; 1997–2024)
- Chair – Downtown Tourism Economic Development Committee (2016–2024)
- Member – Tourism Economic Development Committee (2016–2024)

Community and State Leadership

- Trustee – Lake Delton Village Board (1981–1991; 2001–2024)
- Director – Bank of Wisconsin Dells (1990–2024)
- Director – Wisconsin Dells Education Foundation (2011–2024)
- Founder/President – Association of Wisconsin Tourism Attractions (1985–1989; 2002–2024)
- Founder/Director – Wisconsin Tourism Federation (1985–2024)
- Director – H.H. Bennett Foundation (1998–2024)
- President – Wisconsin DRIVE Coalition (2016–2024)
- Chair – Governor's Council on Tourism (1986–1999)
- Member – Taliesin Preservation Commission (1994)
- Director – Wisconsin Dells United Way (1984–1998)
- Member – Leadership Committee for Restoration of Lake Delton (2008–2009)
- Airport Commissioner – Baraboo-Dells Airport Commission

Legislative and Philanthropic Task Forces

- Governor Thompson's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Gaming (1991)
- Governor Thompson's Minimum Wage Advisory Task Force (1991)
- Governor Thompson's Clean Water Task Force (1987)
- Governor Thompson's Task Force on the Stewardship Program
- Lt. Governor Flynn's Task Force on Funding for Wisconsin Tourism Promotion (1985)
- Governor Earl's Task Force on Circus World Museum
- Midwest Coordinator – Cornell University Capital Campaign