

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gary E. Gardner

PERSON

Gardner, Gary E., 1954-

Alternative Names: Gary E. Gardner;

Life Dates: August 22, 1954-

Place of Birth: Chicago, Illinois, USA

Residence: Chicago, IL

Work: Evergreen Park, IL

Occupations: Hair Care Manufacturer;

Biographical Note

Hair care manufacturer Gary Gardner was born on August 22, 1954 in Chicago, Illinois to Edward and Bettian Gardner. He graduated from the University of Illinois, Chicago with his B.A. degree in pre-law in 1975, and then attended Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where he earned both his J.D. and M.M. degrees in 1982.

In 1964, at age ten, Gardner began working for the family business, Soft Sheen Products, Inc., packaging hair care items with his younger sister in the family's home in Chicago. After graduating from Northwestern in 1982, Gardner rejoined Soft Sheen Products, Inc. and transitioned to president in 1985, succeeding his father, Ed Gardner, who remained as chairman. He served as president until 1996, when he stepped down to pursue his own ethnic hair care company in Chicago called Namaste Laboratories, with his wife, Denise. In 1999, Gardner and his wife launched their own philanthropic organization, the Gary and Denise Family Foundation, which focused on youth participation in the arts. Namaste Laboratories was later bought by the Indian consumer goods producer, Dabur India Ltd., in 2010, and Gardner remained with his management team to continue running the laboratory. In 2014, Gardner co-founded a private equity firm based out of Chicago called P.F.G., LLC, where he also served as president. The following year, Gardner and his wife established the Denise and Gary Gardner Scholarship at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2015 to assist undergraduate students' education at the Art Institute, primarily those from the South Side.

Gardner has been a member of the American Health and Beauty Aids Institute, and during his time as president of Soft Sheen, the company received several awards, including being ranked sixth on Black Enterprise's top 100 service industry companies

in 1987 and, two years later, receiving the title of the Company of the Year by Black Enterprise.

Gardner and his wife reside in Chicago, Illinois, where they run the Gary and Denise Family Foundation and maintain a private art collection. The couple was awarded the Art Alliance of Illinois' Citizen's Advocate Award in 2018.

Gary Gardner was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 13, 2019.

Related Entries

Northwestern University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

J.D. and M.M

University of Illinois at Chicago [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

B.A.

[EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Soft Sheen Products, Inc. [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1985 to 1996]

President

Namaste Laboratories [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1996 to ?]

Founder

P.F.G., LLC [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2014 to ?]

Co-Founder and President

The Gary and Denise Family Foundation [MEMBEROF]

[from 1999 to ?]

Founder

The Denise and Gary Gardner Scholarship at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago [MEMBEROF]

[from 2015 to ?]

Founder

American Health and Beauty Aids Institute [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Member

City Colleges of Chicago [MEMBEROF]

[from 2015 to ?]

Trustee