

JUNE 18, 2007

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## Olds Family Keeps Auto Legacy Alive

By Gerald Scott  
Staff Reporter

The descendants of auto pioneer Ransom Eli Olds remain loyal to the Oldsmobile nameplate and its longtime home in Lansing, even if General Motors Corp. sent the brand out to permanent pasture three years ago. Descendants of R. E. Olds participated in the May 31 "Teddy Roosevelt Day" motorcade as well as the 2007 Oldsmobile Homecoming car show on June 16 - both events were held in Lansing.

There are several lines of Olds' descendants, but among the most visible publicly is that of Peter and Debbie Stephens of Dublin, Ohio. Debbie, now 55, grew up in East Lansing as the great-granddaughter of R. E. Olds. She married Peter Stephens, the now-retired CFO of the International Group of a major fast food chain located in Dublin.

The Stephens have two adult children, Matt, 24, who works as a filmmaker and videographer in Chicago, and Gregg, 20, a student at Ohio University. The Stephens chose Gregg to drive their 1905 REO classic auto in the May 31 "Teddy Roosevelt Day" motorcade in Lansing, all to help keep the Olds' name and legacy in the forefront, even if GM announced it was killing off the nameplate back in 2000 and ceased production by 2004.

The 1905 REO is one of several classics tied to Ransom Olds that the Stephens family owns. Other cars they own include a 1903 Curved Dash Olds Model R, as well as a 1930 Oldsmobile Roadster Convertible Model F30 - Select Six.

"We bought this (1905 REO) because it's part of a plan we had to buy cars related to key dates in R E Olds' automotive history (ed. note: the 1905 REO was the first year of production of the REO car; similarly the Stephens' 1903 Curved Dash was the last year of involvement for RE Olds in Oldsmobile), we wanted to buy certain cars as part of our collection and get our sons involved in their family history," Peter Stephens said. "Right after we bought this, a mutual friend here in Lansing, Jim Perkins, who is on the Roosevelt Committee, called us and asked if we'd

be willing to participate in the parade and bring our car. We said we'd be delighted to participate."

Debbie Stephens has the closest ties back to the Olds family history as it pertains to the Capitol City area. R. E. Olds' first factory was actually in Detroit, located on Jefferson Ave. near Belle Isle, but it burned down in a famous 1899 fire. Several prototypes were saved, Olds regrouped and moved his operations to Lansing. The family prospered with the Olds name throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Said Debbie, "I grew up in East Lansing, my father was Olds Anderson. My mother, Doris, will be here today for the Roosevelt reenactment. My father died in 2003, but he'd get a kick out of watching this today, seeing his grandson (Gregg) drive a REO in an reenactment of his grandfather ."

Peter Stephens was beaming about how the family came to acquire the 1905 REO used in the Lansing/Teddy Roosevelt parade.

"We are only the third owner of this car in its 102-year history," he pointed out. "It was owned by a dealership in California until the mid-1950s when a fellow bought it with the intent of restoring it. In the 1980s, he died. In the early 1990s, his widow had it restored in his memory.

"The restorer drove it around to test it, gave her one ride and then it was put in a garage for 14 years. Then we bought it. Amazing! Only three owners in 102 years!"

The Stephens warmly recalled the 1997 Olds Centennial parade, when Debbie's father was grand marshal and GM and Oldsmobile Division hosted huge parades and gatherings of Oldsmobile and REO cars and trucks from all over the country. Olds Anderson led the parade, riding in a Curved Dash Olds at the head of the main procession down Michigan Avenue to the State Capitol that year.

Everywhere they go, especially cruises and car club gatherings, the Stephens say they continue to hear only praise for Oldsmobile and what the brand achieved in its long history covering portions of the 19<sup>th</sup>, all of the 20<sup>th</sup> and part of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

**Taken from the local Olds club newsletter in 2006:**

**The Lineage from RE Olds to the Stephens Family**

Ransom E. and Metta Olds had two daughters. The elder of the two was Debbie Stephens' grandmother, Gladys Olds. She married Bruce Anderson and their eldest son, R.E. Olds ("Olds") Anderson, was Debbie's father. As "Olds" was also the eldest of R.E. Olds' grandchildren, he served as the family spokesperson for many years. Those of you who attended the Olds Centennial in Lansing in 1997 may remember Debbie's father as the Grand Marshall. Since her father's passing last year, Debbie has stepped up to fill the void.