

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bill Costen

PERSON

Costen, Bill, 1947-

Alternative Names: Bill Costen;

Life Dates: November 4, 1947-

Place of Birth: Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Residence: Bloomfield, CT

Work: Bloomfield, CT

Occupations: Hot Air Balloon Pilot;

Biographical Note

Hot air balloonist Bill Costen was born on November 4, 1947, in Omaha, Nebraska, to Dolores and William T. Costen. He received his B.S. degree in mathematics and psychology in 1970 from Morris Brown College, in Atlanta, Georgia. He also attended the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Costen worked as a Union Pacific Railroad porter from 1965 to 1969. Then, in 1970, he was drafted by the Buffalo Bills professional football team, in Buffalo, New York, before joining their farm team, the Hartford Knights, in Hartford, Connecticut. In Hartford, Costen worked as an insurance underwriter at several insurance companies, including Travelers Insurance, CG/Aetna, and CIGNA, before founding Sky Endeavors, a hot air balloon company, in Bloomfield, Connecticut, in 1975. Since then, Sky Ventures has expanded to include the Costen Cultural Exhibit traveling museum in 1988 and the Costen Cultural Virtual Exhibit in 2022. Costen also founded Costen Photography in 1999. In 2016, Costen received the Ed Yost Master Pilot Award, making him the world's first African American Hot Air Balloon Master Pilot, before retiring from piloting hot air balloons in 2018. In 2021, the documentary film *Balloon Man*, about Costen, and directed by Costen's daughter, Chantal Potter, was released. It received the Film of The Year award at the 2020 Rhode Island Black Film Festival and was also nominated for the 2021 HBO Max Best Documentary at the Run&Shoot Filmworks Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival. Costen was a founding member of the Ebony Chess Society of Hartford, Connecticut, and served as the club's president from 1975 to 1984. He has been a member of the Balloon Federation of America since 1976. From 1977 to 1986, Costen also served as a member of the International Professional Balloon Pilots Racing Association, in addition to serving, since 1989, on the board of directors of the New England Air Museum.

Costen and his wife, Lynda Costen, live in Bloomfield, Connecticut. They have two children, William Jarrell Costen and Chantal Costen Potter. Bill Costen was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 31, 2022.

Related Entries

Hope Lutheran School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

King Science and Technology Magnet Center [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Omaha Central High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

High School Diploma

University of Nebraska-Lincoln [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

N/A

Morris Brown College [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

B.S.

Union Pacific Railroad [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1965 to 1969]

Chair Car Porter

Travelers Data Center [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1970 to 1972]

Supervisor

Traveler's Insurance, Co. [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1973 to 1977]

Senior Account Analyst

CG/Aetna [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1977 to 1981]

Senior Account Analyst

CNA [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1981 to 1984]

Senior Account Analyst

Sky Endeavors, LLC [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1975 to 2018]

Founder

The Costen Cultural Exhibit [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1988 to ?]

Founder

Ebony Chess Society [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

President

Balloon Federation of America [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Member

International Professional Balloon Pilots Racing Association [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Member

New England Air Museum [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Member

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