

# WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown heroes who have made a difference.

## Archileen Chambers

**A** former vaudeville dancer, Terre Haute native Archileen Chambers was a mainstay in local artistic and entertainment circles for nearly five decades.

Born Sept. 19, 1910, Archileen was the only child of popular restaurateur Archie Earl "Chili" Chambers and his wife Maudette. Proprietor of Chambers Chili Shop with successive downtown locations at 26 South Seventh St. and 710 Ohio St., Archie was a colorful personality in the early 20th century, even entering the 1917 mayoral race. He also was a talented musician, specializing in the xylophone, saxo-



phone and drums. Maudette was an accomplished pianist. When Archileen was a child, her father organized a 12-piece orchestra and had a special set of drums made so his daughter could participate. She also took dancing lessons from Rose Farrington at 634-1/2 Wabash Ave.

By the time she was eight years old, Archileen was presenting recitals as a dancer, pianist and drummer. She also studied with local dance teachers Eunice Schramm, Ernestine Myers and Reid C. Marlatt. In 1928, while attending Wiley High School, she was booked to appear as a featured dancer on the Balaban & Katz vaudeville circuit. Barney Balaban and Sam Katz were theater pioneers, builders of the plush Riviera, Chicago and Regal theaters in Chicago and owners of 125 theaters around the country. During this experience encompassing two years, Archileen was featured at the Circle Theater in Indianapolis with Dick Powell before he took his talents to Hollywood. Subsequently, she toured with the RKO Circuit for a year in *Deers and Idears of 1930*.

Tired of traveling, Archileen returned to Terre Haute in 1931 and opened a dance school at 324 South Fourth St. In 1946 Archileen Chambers Dance Academy was moved to 9 South 13th St., above Dawson & Meagher Drug Store, where it remained until she retired in 1964. Several of her pupils became professionals. Each year Archileen and her students appeared in local benefits, including the popular *Elks Minstrels* and the *Tribune-Star Christmas Follies*. Often she was paired with dancer Norman Nasser, pianist Ann Cahill or vocalist Les Cahill. Archileen's father died March 13, 1947. Subsequently, her uncle Bill Chambers earned prominence as proprietor of Chile Bill's restaurant at 425 North 13th St.

In the early 1960s, Archileen married Shubert Sebree, formerly a close associate of Eugene V. Debs and the 1918 Socialist Party Congressional candidate. A man of many talents, Sebree was a labor leader, professional photographer and a book collector. The couple resided at 213 North 13th St., where Sebree managed an antiquarian book business until his death, at age 90, on June 21, 1980. Twenty years younger than her husband, Archileen died Jan. 18, 2002, at Lakeview Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. She was 91 years old.

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