



## Seneca High School Class of '69

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“From Seneca Hallways to Nairobi Nights: Louisville’s Best-Kept Secret Who Ditched Gavels for Saxophones to the International Ambassador of Swing”.

Michael Tracy’s musical journey began long before sold-out jazz clubs in Nairobi and before he became an International Ambassador of Swing —it started right here in Louisville, Kentucky, and YES, proudly at Seneca High School. Like many Seneca students, Michael arrived with curiosity, talent, and just enough restlessness to look beyond the classroom windows. Even then, he was tuning his ears to the wider world, unknowingly preparing for a life that would take him from Kentucky hallways to stages in over 50 countries and multiple continents. Seneca helped shape the foundation—confidence, curiosity, and a belief that big dreams were not only allowed, but encouraged.

Ironically, young Michael once flirted with a very un-jazzy idea: becoming a lawyer. After tagging along with his father to court one day, he quickly realized that legal arguments lacked a decent rhythm section. Boredom struck, the gavel fell, and music won. He switched paths, chose Music for his undergraduate studies, and never looked back. Along the way, he absorbed lessons not just in notes and scales, but in humanity—learning from master musicians who taught him to listen deeply, stay inquisitive, and care about people as much as performance.

The saxophone, now practically an extension of Michael's DNA, entered his life thanks to a childhood twist of fate—and a dental assessment. At age nine, he wanted to play trumpet, but a teacher gently suggested that his teeth might prefer another option. Enter the saxophone. His parents found one, lessons followed, and jazz history quietly changed course. Today, at 74, Michael is still playing, proving that good tone, like good humor, only improves with age.

Michael's legacy extends far beyond performance. For more than 47 years, he taught at a single University by choice, building a jazz program from the ground up into a thriving, full-scale facility. His classroom welcomed students from Brazil, Argentina, Russia, Scotland, and beyond—turning his corner of academia into a global jazz crossroads. He could have gone anywhere, but he chose commitment over convenience, mentorship over mobility, and students over spotlights.

That same devotion carried into his family life. A proud father of twins—now 32 and musically gifted themselves—Michael ensured that music and stability played in harmony at home. His daughter mastered the harp; his son followed the saxophone trail. And in December 2024, when Michael Tracy took the stage in Nairobi for his first visit to Africa and sold out the show, it was clear: this Seneca graduate didn't just build a career—he built a global musical legacy. From Louisville to Kenya, from Seneca halls to world stages, Michael Tracy continues to prove that jazz, like a good education, travels beautifully. Let the good times roll...