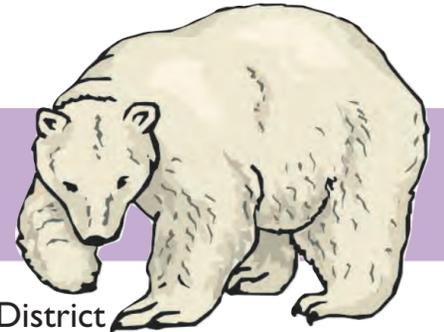


LifeStyles

SECTION C • THE DILLSBURG BANNER • MAY 10, 2012

Northern High School Alumni

Where Are They Now?



~ Superintendant of Northern Lebanon School District

Don L. Bell, Sr., Ed.D. - "An Educational Change Agent"

By Steven M. Nesbit

Feature Writer/Dillsburg Banner

"Kids first, progressive – not perfect – and a legacy of unity." These three visions for Northern Lebanon School District were actually created by the teachers at Northern High School when Dr. Don L. Bell was a principal there in 1995. "Those three goals are awesome," said Bell. "However, I don't believe they can ever be reached." When he became the superintendant at Northern Lebanon, Bell used those three goals as the district's mission statement.

Don was born in Mechanicsburg on April 4, 1963. His parents lived in downtown Dillsburg, right off the square by the library in the Gasswint apartments, when their first son, Bob, was born. His parents then moved to a house on Nursery Road prior to Don's birth. Later, they built a home on the same road, where Don spent his childhood and teen years. Dillsburg Elementary, which is the administration building today, is where he began his educational journey. The old original high school was the district's middle school back then, and Northern high school was the building that is now used as the middle school.

As a kid growing up in rural America, it was Dave Baptisti and Don's brother, Bob, who spent most of their time together playing with Don. "We went outside and made up games to play. We invented a game called 'Pitcher, Catcher and Outfielder.' We'd play an entire baseball game with three people in our small yard. We thought it was the greatest thing in the world," said Don. In elementary/middle school, Dwayne Hoffman became a great friend, and as Don and his buddies got older, their interests changed to go-karts, dirt tracks and mini-bikes.

Looking back, Don said, "Playing outside gave kids the ability to be creative. We relied on what we had. We didn't have to go out and say to our parents, 'I want, I want, I want.' We said to ourselves, 'This is what we have; how do we make this into what we want?' Nowadays, it's a world of technology, and I think it is great how we use it in education, but at the same time, I believe it has taken away some of our kids' creativity ... Yes, we are opening the door with the technology, but we're limiting our children's ability to think and to be creative, and I don't think that's a good thing right now."

During Don's teenage years he was very involved with high school sports. He played football, baseball and wrestling. "I fell off a bridge when fishing with a friend and I broke my ankle," he said. "So, I decided that was enough of wrestling. Football and baseball carried me throughout my teenage years. I thoroughly enjoyed my high school days."

At home, there was a pool in the back yard so friends would drop in. The Class of 1981 got along very well, according to Don. He and his classmates were always doing something together. Don remembers sitting at Hoffman's Drive-In, which was Gary's Drive-In during the 1960s and today is Pakha's Thai House. "Dave Waltman, Jason Witmer and Bruce Seik were close friends," said Don, with a grin. "I had a great high school experience. I wouldn't change a thing."

Don graduated from Northern in 1981. He knew what he wanted to be when he grew up ever since he was a young boy. His grandfather, who died when Don was 6 years old, was in education. He was a teacher, counselor and administrator, and



Playing 20 Questions with Don Bell, Sr. - Class of 1981

Northern High School Principal 1991-95

1. **What talent would you like to have?** The ability to sing. They wouldn't even give me the bucket to carry a tune.
2. **What's your biggest pet peeve?** When people put self-imposed limitations on themselves and don't live up to their full potential
3. **Who were your mentors?** My parents and my wife. Dr. Kenneth Miller, assistant superintendent at Northern York, retired; Dr. Duff Rearick, superintendent at Greencastle-Antrim School District, retired; Mr. Dennis Hillwig, principal at Chambersburg High School, retired.
4. **Three words to describe yourself?** Visionary, passionate and trustworthy
5. **What type of music do you listen to?** Contemporary Christian or classic rock – there's a combination for you.

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See Playing twenty questions

worked for the Department of Education back when York County had a county school system in late 1950s. "His love for education made me want to become an educator," said Don, who keeps a picture of his grandfather in his office.

As an undergraduate, Don attended Glenville State Teacher's College in Glenville, W.V. He was fortunate to be able to continue his two loves after high school: teaching and playing football. Glenville did something that no other teacher's college offered at that time. If a student wanted to be a teacher, in his first semester as a freshman he would go into a classroom and observe for a two-week period, and the second-semester freshman had to observe for a little bit longer. As students became upperclassmen, they spent more and more time in the classroom environment.

Glenville State was handling teacher education differently. "If you were not absolutely positive that you wanted to be a teacher, you would soon realize one way or the other before you graduated with a degree you would probably never use," said Don. "Even today, your student teaching takes place during your senior year, when you are wrapping everything up ... I've seen far too many kids say, 'Oops, I don't want to do this.'"

Glenville prepared Don for what he wanted to do, to teach health and physical education. "I was able to get a great education and to play football for another four years. Who wouldn't love to do that?"

Don graduated from Glenville in 1985 with a B.A. in health and physical education and a minor in safety education. Unfortunately, teaching positions were scarce at that time, but, in 1986, a "long-term

sub" position in health and physical education opened at Northern. The young boy who grew up on Nursery Road and dedicated his career to his grandpa had just taken his first step on the educational career ladder by accepting his first "real" teaching job in his hometown.

The year he started Northern was being evaluated by the Middle States Association, which is responsible for accrediting educational institutions. The association utilizes educational professionals to survey, observe and evaluate a school district. "One of the observers in my classroom was the principal at Chambersburg High School," said Don. "He said, 'Next year, we're going to have a driver's-ed position available, and I knew you were certified. Do you want to come to Chambersburg for that job?' Don didn't have to think too long about that question. He answered him right away, 'Absolutely!'"

Don told his wife the good news, and she went with him to visit the school, as he still had to have his

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See Where Are They Now.



Richard "Rick" Williamson recently had a chance to see the Harlem Globetrotters, the first time since he was a kid, and he really enjoyed the game.

SECOND WIND DREAMS

Harlem Globtrotter pays a visit to Dillsburg resident

Carla Maddox

Staff Reporter/Dillsburg Banner

During March Madness, a dream came true at Elmcroft. Who would ever have thought that 6-foot-5 Wun "The Shot" Versher of the Harlem Globetrotters, ducking through the doors to enter the Elmcroft Senior Living and Memory Care facility, would have answered a resident's dream? Well, he did.

For Richard "Rick" Williamson, having Versher come to Elmcroft specifically to see him was a Second Wind Dream come true. Reaching out again to the Second Wind Dreams Foundation, Elmcroft's staff was not only able to have one of the famous Globetrotters answer a wish, they demon-

strated a level of caring and understanding of the aging process that makes a difference for their residents.

Rick grew up and went to high school in the Reading area. He loved playing basketball and wanted to play for his high school team until a physical issue kept him from the game. He entered the General Motor's Institute, now Kettering University, and graduated as a mechanical engineer. Upon fulfillment of his five-year commitment to GM, he then moved to the Harrisburg area to work for AMP until 1999, when it was bought by Tyco International and Rick retired. During his working adult years, he never lost his love of the game and would often attend Lebanon Valley

and Albright college hoops.

The Harlem Globetrotters are still phenomenal athletes and entertainers. Rick had seen them live once at the Hershey Arena, but would mostly watch their games on television. In the same manner as prior Globetrotters, Versher was able to dazzle Rick and many other Elmcroft residents with some of the ball tricks the players use to confuse their opponents, entertain the crowds and win games. Versher is one of the greatest shooters in team history – the 4-point shot is well within his range – and has been a part of the organization's most memorable moments. He also gave Rick free tickets to watch the Globetrotters play at the Giant Center on Friday,

March 23.

Attending the Globetrotters game was a real treat for Rick. The Globetrotters played an all-Star international elite team, and were ahead when they left.

"I think they (The Elites) pretty much knew what to expect," Rick said. "They (Globetrotters) pulled a lot of tricks, like dribbling the ball through an opponent's legs and doing 'the weave,' where they dribble the ball through a line and keep passing to their teammates. It's hard for the other team to defend."

Rick swelled with emotion when reflecting on his favorite part of the experi-

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See Second Wind Dreams

Simpson Library thanks Mechanicsburg commissioners for support, announces new projects

Erica Smithson

Staff Reporter/Dillsburg Banner

Members of Mechanicsburg's Joseph T. Simpson Library, including its director Sue Erdman and those serving on its Board of Trustees, took to the council meetings of both the Mechanicsburg Borough and Upper Allen Township last week to thank each group of commissioners for their continued financial support of the library. In addition to these two municipalities, Simpson receives the support of Shiremanstown, Monroe Township and Silver Spring Township.

At the presentation in Upper Allen Township, Erdman said, "Each year is financially challenging," but she uses every opportunity she has to spread the word about the value of the public library system. For better or worse, it takes a lot of money to make the library run smoothly. Three-fourths of their operating budget is given through three sources: the county (55 percent), state funds (16 percent, but that number continues to rise, said Erdman) and municipal and school support comes in at 4 percent. The remaining 25 percent, or about \$200,000 annually, is left through fundraising appeals, events, overdue fines and support through their largest benefactors, the Friends of the Library.

Despite all of these costs, the library has received generous local support. Trustee secretary Karen Cochran said that the Upper Allen Board of Commissioners in particular has given them \$17,000, which amounts to about \$1 per resident of the township.

Board member Earnie Zimmerman said at the Borough meeting that though the library's additional funding from the state has decreased, because of local support, they have not had to drastically reduce their operating hours. During the school year, the library is open seven days per week for 62 hours and during the summer, operates for 55 hours over a six-day week.

With all of the changes in media from going to physical, printed editions of books, music and movies — all of which could be considered the lifeblood of any library — to digital copies, which can be obtained from home, why is support for a library important anymore? Board member Annie Miller put it simply, saying that the library "is really a wonderful gem in the community." The Simpson Library, and in particular, its central location in downtown Mechanicsburg is what drew Miller and her husband to move back to the area from Pittsburgh years ago. "We came to look at the town and I fell in love with the ability to walk my kids to school and walk to the library. So, we bought a house right smack in town and that's exactly what we do." Even as a child, Miller's husband had fond memories of walking to the library, she said.

Libraries are also central hubs of knowledge and resources that are shared with their community. Simpson Library takes that commitment to heart. It offers free Internet access, and people often fill the library with their laptops and utilize the provided computers. "It is a wonderful service for people

who can't afford their own internet," Miller said.

The library reaches out to all age groups. They offer toddler programs inside the library, and librarians have visited every pre-school and elementary school in the area. At the other end of the age spectrum, Simpson recently unveiled its newest project, the Senior Space near the large print section of the library. They used a \$4,000 federal grant to purchase electronic reading tablets such as the Kindle and Nook, an iPad and digital cameras for seniors to use and also offer classes on how to use the technology. The space will also be used for holding educational classes for seniors, including a class on health and wellness.

The library also strives to find a common ground with the growing digital market while still providing its free and convenient method of borrowing materials. Erdman said that while the library continues to delve into the e-book market, it proves to be challenging because a lot of e-book vendors do not like the idea of libraries lending copies of digital books to multiple people and would prefer that each person buy an individual copy.

"A lot of publishers are pulling out of having their titles available to us through the e-book vendor that we use, so it's an unsettled territory," said Erdman. The library is doing its best to offer digital books for people to download to the Kindle, Nook and iPad through its distributor, Overdrive Media. You can find their selection online under the Capital Area Library District website, which loans books out to all



Photos by Curt Werner/Dillsburg Banner

Joseph T. Simpson Library, Mechanicsburg

the libraries in Cumberland, Perry and Dauphin Counties. However, not every published title is offered and copies of each book are limited. Erdman said she is on the lookout to see how technology develops in the next few years and how public libraries will adapt. "We just don't know the answer to that yet," she said.

More positively, Erdman and the other trustees present at each meeting used their time to announce upcoming fundraising events to benefit the library. On Thursday, May 10, the library will hold Restaurant Night at Isaac's Deli in both Silver Spring Commons and the Rossmoynne Business Center that will benefit Friends of the Library. Friends and family can enjoy a meal at Isaac's and 25 percent of the cost of the meal will go to the library's program. Simpson sponsors Restaurant Night about once per month.

The library kicks off its summer reading program Saturday, June 9, from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m., which will include grilled hot dogs, ice cream and games for children. Their sixth annual Run for Reading is scheduled to take place in August at Friendship Park in Upper Allen Township.

Larger events include a "Simply Simpson" night of dinner and dancing. The successful event was held in February 2012 at Allenberry Playhouse and is scheduled again next year for Feb. 17. A fashion show is planned in September at the popular venue Stock's Manor, also in Upper Allen Township.

At both meetings, the library's staff and trustees thanked the commissioners for their support of the library, knowing that support of the library means support of the residents under their jurisdiction who use the library's resources to their

fullest. The gratitude was also reciprocated by the commissioners. Upper Allen's Commission President Kenneth M. Martin said working with the library "is one of those projects I think we all wholeheartedly enjoy because it provides us with important community service." He also appreciated how vocal library has been and continues to be with thanking its partners, saying that acknowledgment of supporters is a unique approach for this nonprofit organization to take. "We all like to partner with organizations that are grateful and really see us as a partner," he said.

With its passion helping to educate and lend resources to its patrons and its excellent standing with its supporters, the Joseph T. Simpson Library is truly a pillar of the Mechanicsburg community.

Where are they now?

Continued from page 1C.

"official" interview. They were both surprised when his wife was asked to sit in on the interview. Don said, "The interview was only 10 minutes. After all, the principal had observed me at Northern. The principal turned to my wife and asked, 'Was what he said right?' She said, 'Yes,' and I was hired on the spot."

An interesting twist was about to be discovered. One of the superintendents at Chambersburg was George A. Tjiattas, a former superintendent at Northern. "Tjiattas had worked with my grandfather, Percy Cable, way back when," said Don, who believes some meetings and relationships are the result of divine intervention. "Finding that information was an incredible connection for me!"

Chambersburg was very different from Northern. "When I went to Chambersburg, it was the 10th-largest school district in Pennsylvania. There were 900 students per class," he said. From February 1991 through July 1995, he wore similar, yet very different hats. He was a junior high assistant principal, high school grade level principal, summer school principal and alternative high school principal. Along the way, in 1990, he received his master's degree in administration from Shippensburg University.

In the summer of 1995, Don returned to his hometown to become a Polar Bear one more time. Nine years after he was the driver-training "long term sub" in 1986, Don was hired as the high school principal, a job he would do for the next four years. "There was some apprehension when I came back as a long-term substitute at Northern with teachers who were my teachers," said Don. "This time I was coming back as the principal who would have a direct supervisory role over some of my former teachers." But any fears he had were short-lived. "The staff was just spectacular with me being principal," he said. "They were great teachers. It was an honor to go back and work with them, and I learned a lot from them. I was a supervisor with them, not for them."

In 1996, Don earned his Doctor of Education from the University of Pittsburgh. In July of 1999, he was hired as the superintendent of Northern Lebanon School District (NLSLD). But the district was facing troubled times, as it was the second-largest public school ever involved in a fraud case. NLSLD had a building project go bad and the district lost \$25 million. There were town hall meetings and calls to get people fired. "It was not pretty," said Don. "I didn't live it, I read it. There's a big difference between the two. So, when I got here, there was no trust and no integrity and no money and a huge problem with teacher morale, and rightly so."

Don told the Board he would accept the position only if he was given some freedom. He told them, "I'm going to be in Blair County courthouse three days a week, talking with bankers in Ireland trying to get your money back." Don spent most of his first year trying to get the money back and eventually he succeeded — another step up on the ladder of educational excellence.

Now, after a decade of working with the challenges of NLSLD, his ability to "see the invisible" has allowed him to turn things around, and today NLSLD has become one of the most innovative and progressive school districts in Pennsylvania. It's an achievement in which Don takes pride, though he doesn't consider his work finished. "We are now a very good school district, but we're not great yet."

"I've learned there's a list and a priority that you need to keep in place. It's faith, family and job, in that order. If you keep them in order you are going to be successful in meeting your challenges," he said. He believes it is easy to tell the people what they want to hear, but it's hard to do the right

thing all the time.

"My perfect world is when I've satisfied 50 percent of the people," said Don. What sets him apart from his peers is that he is not afraid to fail, and he thrives at seeing things nobody else sees. What that means to Dr. Bell is this: "Out of 100 ideas, we might use one of them, and in my world, that is OK ... I've had great teachers, I've had great mentors and I've had great programs. I am so blessed I would not change a thing. I'm doing what I love to do in a place with people who really care. I don't know how it gets any better than that."

Highlights of Accomplishments

Recognized by the Pennsylvania Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development as a leader of "Best Practices" in staff evaluation

Recognized as the leader of an "Exemplary Program Award" for excellence and innovation in curriculum development practices

Recognized as a leader in Pennsylvania for Creating College in the High School programs with Harrisburg Area Community College

Recognized as one of the Top 40 "Professional Leaders" in Central Pennsylvania - Harrisburg Magazine

Recognized as one of the Top 16 "Movers and Shapers" of Central Pennsylvania - Harrisburg Magazine

Keynote Speaker in Maryland, Kentucky, North Carolina, New York, Kansas, Mississippi, Virginia and Pennsylvania - Topic: School Construction, Building Schools for the 21st Century, Educational Planning for the Present While Envisioning the Future

Published author in a nationally recognized and distributed publication: American Association of School Administrators, The School Administrator, "A Team Approach to Building a New School"

Published author in a statewide recognized and distributed publication: Pennsylvania Educational Leadership Foundation, The Pennsylvania Administrator, "Virtual Education - A New Landscape in Public Education," "School Evaluations of High School Teachers," "Elementary K-4 Summer Academy - A Lighthouse Project," "School Reform Includes Teacher Wellness"

Requested to present before the Pennsylvania House Appropriations Committee on education

Requested to present at the National School Boards Association Conference on technology and learning in schools

Requested to participate in several educational panel discussions at Shippensburg University

Selected as a peer reviewer for state and federal grants

Developed and implemented several school-to-career, majors programs for multiple schools

Developed and instituted a district-wide comprehensive teacher supervision program

Playing twenty questions

Continued from 1C

6. What's your idea of relaxation? Hunting, fishing and outdoor sports, spending time with my grandkids and watching the beginning and the end of a NASCAR race, because I usually sleep during the middle.
7. If you could spend a day with anyone living or dead, who would it be? Jesus Christ. I would envision just sitting and listening to Him all day.
8. Name something people would be surprised to know about you? As much as I love football, during the NFL draft last week, I was watching an hour and a half of "Swamp People."
9. Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn? Twitter, as a ghostwriter. I'm doing that now.
10. If you were a super-hero, what power would you have? The ability to help everybody to achieve their goals
11. What are your favorite TV shows? Obviously, "Swamp People," "Last Man Standing," "Pawn Stars" and "Storage Wars." I like comedy. I don't get much of that as a superintendent.
12. What was the lowest grade you ever got on your report card? A "D" in Health, and I went on to teach it.
13. What makes you laugh? My grandkids. They make me laugh hysterically.
14. What makes you angry? I really don't get angry. That would be a waste of my energy.
15. What makes you cry? In sorrow, the loss of my mother and my father-in-law; In joy, the birth of my three grandchildren.
16. If you were a fictional character, who would you emulate? Captain Kirk from the original "Star Trek." I loved his ingenuity.
17. What's your favorite quote? "Lead with vision."
18. If you could go back in time, where would you go? I'd go back to my senior year in high school, so I could meet my wife again.
19. Do you have a favorite movie? "Wild Hogs." I've watched it again and again, and I just laugh hysterically.
20. What's the best advice you ever received? "Eat your peas." One of my mentors used that phrase, meaning to take care of the little things. When you take care of the little things, you are better prepared to take care of the bigger things. You can't take care of the big things unless you eat your peas.

Where Are They Now?

Did you graduate from NHS in the 1980s or 1990s?

Who in your class would be a good candidate for an alumni feature?

If you want to refer someone, please email their name, phone number and a few sentences to snestbit3@comcast.net.