



Rolf Olsen

August 25, 1908 - January 19, 2010

“With tact and true concern for all parties affected” is how a longtime school board member described the work and character of former Onamia principal and superintendent Rolf G. Olsen. Mr. Olsen died on January 19, 2010, leaving behind a legacy of education with integrity and compassion.

Rolf Olsen was born August 25, 1908 in Morris, Minnesota, the son of Rev. Engel and Gunda (Lund) Olsen. In 1919 the family moved to Colfax, Wisconsin where Rolf graduated from high school. He then moved on to Luther College in Decorah, Iowa to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1930. at Luther he enjoyed a distinguished career as a singer and was asked to return after graduation to sing with a special ensemble that performed in the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah.

He began teaching in Dallas, Wisconsin and soon became the supervising principal at nearby Prairie Farm. There he became reacquainted with high school classmate Borghild “Buggs” Fjelsted, and they were married on December 30, 1937. The couple lived in Prairie Farm until 1942 when Rolf joined the Red Cross to become a field director, working in Illinois, Texas, and Wisconsin. In 1945 he became an unemployment compensation examiner for the state of Wisconsin, but education was his true calling, so he moved to Minnesota, answering the call to be principal of Onamia High School. He served as principal until 1962, in the meantime earning the Master’s Degree in School Administration from the University of Minnesota. In 1962 he became superintendent of the Onamia School District. He semi-retired in 1970 to

attend summer institutes that led to his introducing to the curriculum and teaching two innovative courses in Native American History and Environmental Studies. He also served as an administrative consultant at this time.

In 1973 Mr. Olsen joined American Guidance Publishing Company and traveled throughout the Midwest and west consulting with educators and promoting appropriate educational materials. Always the true educator, Mr. Olsen experienced changes from a rural, one-teacher, single-school-building that housed grades one-through-twelve to modern consolidated schools that employed many teachers specializing in a variety of disciplines. Through it all, Rolf Olsen focused on what he called “sound fundamentals that helped our graduates as they went into the world of work or higher education.”

Throughout his career in Onamia, Mr. Olsen was active in civic and church responsibilities. He served on the city council for many years, including the formative years for the Onamia Hospital for which he was part of a core group of imaginative proponents. Rolf and his wife were strong supporters both financially and spiritually of what he thought was “the finest small-town hospital and staff in the country.” Mr. Olsen was also instrumental in building the new Bethany Lutheran Church where he sang in the choir, occasionally taught Sunday School, and served on the church council for many years. In addition to his leadership roles, he was not shy about “painting a wall or pounding a nail or two.”

Rolf Olsen remained a resident of Onamia for the rest of his life. He was grateful to the community for support and love, and he was proud of his work as an educator, always giving the credit to the students.” If I were to list the success of those who were once students at our schools,” he once said, “the list would be a long one, I’m sure.”

“He ran a smooth ship,” said a former board member, “and his first love was getting to know the kids.”

Rolf Olsen is survived by his son, Paul Olsen of Bettendorf, IA;

grandsons, David Olsen of Los Angeles, CA and Eric Olsen also of Los Angeles, CA.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Borghild Olsen; son, David Olsen; four sisters; and two brothers.

Previous Events

Service

FEB 7. 4:00 PM (CT)

Bethany Lutheran Church - Onamia
500 Lindquist St
Onamia, MN 56359

Tribute Wall



“ *Rolf Olsen*

January 21, 2023 at 11:59 AM



“ *I had the great pleasure of knowing Mr. Olsen, not only as a principal, but he also was my German teacher for 2 years. He was the most compassionate, caring person, and I will always treasure the memories and advice he gave us in our developmental years.##imported-begin##Alice Simi (Riedemann)##imported-end##*

February 11, 2010 at 06:54 AM



“ *What an honor it was to have known Mr. Olsen. I became an educator myself and I always compared the principals I worked for, with Mr, Olsen and none of them quite measured up. He was a great school administrator, but more importantly he was a great man. When God created Mr. Olsen He threw away the mold~~~there will never be another like him. I extend my condolences to Paul and the rest of his family.##imported-begin##Don Kuschel##imported-end##*

February 04, 2010 at 08:38 PM



“ *Paul, we were so saddened to hear about Rolf's passing. As I said in the card he is up there playing Onamia Rummy with your mom, my parents and Roy & Vonne Jackson. Sorry we can't make it to the memorial service, but our thoughts and prayers are with Jeanne, David, Eric and you.##imported-begin##Robert & Patricia Henry##imported-end##*

February 04, 2010 at 05:46 PM



“ I can only echo what others are saying, and add that he certainly deserved to have a building, "The R.O.C.", dedicated to him. If he or any of us could come back in fifty years, what will we find?
John Stanley and Clarice
Steckman.##imported-begin##John Stanley Steckman##imported-end##

February 01, 2010 at 11:31 PM



“ How fortunate were we who graduated when Mr. Olsen was at the helm. He was the most caring and most kind principal that I have ever met. We were the lucky ones to have known him in those early years of our education. Also, we Lindquists were also lucky to have had Buggs and Rolf as our long-time neighbors. Mildred Johnson, our Aunt, would also echo these feelings if she were alive today. Both she and Rolf were "giants" in our school. Both are sincerely missed by all of our Lindquist family. Sincerely, Alice##imported-begin##Alice Lindquist Jacobsen##imported-end##

February 01, 2010 at 06:55 PM



“ I will always remember Mr. Olsen as the kindest, most caring person in the Onamia High School school. He unfailing remembered everyone (and even the year they graduated!) even into his very late years. I once stopped at Bethany Lutheran Church on the spur of the moment on a Sunday morning to attend the service. Mr. Olsen was ushering that day and it made my day to see him. This was long after he had retired from his Superintendent position at the school. When my beloved sister-in-law (Glenda Hayes) died, he came out to Lakeview Community Church to attend her funeral service. I last saw him 2 summers ago when Onamia had the all-school reunion. I made a point to go over to briefly visit with him. I will miss him and always have very fond memories of him.##imported-begin##Barbara (Hayes) Bailey##imported-end##

February 01, 2010 at 04:08 PM



“ Mr.Olsen was truly a man of great compassion and character. He was fair, honest and caring. I received so much insight and advice from both him and Bugs, when I was running for school board. He was not surprised that I was trying for a spot on the board, and told me AGAIN, what he had told me when I was a student, you can do it. The community will really miss this man of character. He has made an impact on a lot of lives.
Sincerely Karen (Kruschek)Boser##imported-begin##Karen Boser (Kruschek class of 61)##imported-end##

February 01, 2010 at 12:11 PM