

The History Corner:  
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#### A Tribute to Phil Carlson

Phil Carlson knows a day will arrive this June when he will drive up Ryan Road on the way to his job as director of North Shore Community School for the very last time. "It will be a bittersweet day for me, but I also know it is a day that must come". Talked out of retirement two years ago Phil took over the directorship of a school that he was already well familiar with. "I know at my age they didn't hire me for my energy, my guess is they hired me because they thought of me as family." Thinking he would first come on as a temporary consultant for just a few months, his tenure has now lasted two years. "I wasn't involved for very long before that same old feeling for North Shore got a hold of me, so it didn't take much arm twisting to get me to stay. It's hardly considered a job when you love something so much." But now he feels it is time to retire for good and turn over the helm to someone new. Part of that comes from the fact that Phil feels he is leaving North Shore in very good hands. "This is the most enthusiastic staff I have ever worked with and it is a most remarkable place to work. I know this school will be here for years to come."

In some respects returning to North Shore for Phil was like coming home for a second time. Born in French River, Phil attended Bloomingdale School in his early years and graduated from Clover Valley High School. His senior class consisted of only 13 students. Phil played football, basketball and track, graduating in 1956. After high school he went on to UMD where in 1962 he received his teaching certificate. In that same year he married his childhood sweetheart, Diane MacLean, the little girl he had first met 16 years earlier when he asked if he could join her in a sandbox she was playing in, something, that up until that time, Phil had never seen. After marriage Phil and Diane moved to the cities where Phil got a job teaching in St. Paul while Diane acquired work in the Minneapolis school system. "We found ourselves living in the cities but our hearts were still back in French River-Clover Valley", Phil explained. After three years of spending nearly every weekend driving back "home" they left the cities and moved permanently back north in 1965.

Phil was hired almost immediately as a 5th grade teacher at North Shore, the school that had just a year or so before replaced Bloomingdale as the community elementary. After about ten years of teaching, Phil became North Shore Elementary School's principal, a position he held until his "first" retirement, which occurred in 1994. Over his nearly forty years of involvement with the school Phil has developed a deep reservoir of experiences with which to spin his seemingly endless array of stories. Whether it is of a goat running between classrooms, pulling intercom wires with Ken Hendrickson through the labyrinth of tunnels underneath the school, hacking out the original nature trail with an axe and chainsaw, or of the travails of buses stuck in the "frost boils" of spring, the delight and joy that comes over Phil's face and the laughter that accompanies his storytelling are the most obvious indications of a career and a life very well lived.

In at least a few cases the students who now walk the halls of North Shore are the children of the children of the children Phil first taught 40 years ago -- a reality that he is clearly aware of but one that has seemed not to have dimmed any of his enthusiasm. "Mentally I don't feel any different. The same feelings are there that I have always had. The only difference is that I look in the mirror everyday, and my gosh, its not the same person I see who began here forty years ago." We stood together for a while talking in the outer office before he looked at me and said, "Say, if you've got a second I would like to

show you something. He walked me outside the front doors of the school and then pointed in the direction of the flagpole. "You see that round ball that sits at the very top of the pole, what do you think that is?", I looked up to the silver globe Phil referred to, turned to him and shook my head. "Well," he went on, "there are things around here that one needs to know but they are not the type of things that are ever going to be written down anywhere. They only get passed on if the person who knows tells someone else." Phil turned my direction back to the pole and as he started to speak a smile began to creep across his face, "From down here that decoration sure looks nice, but you know, it is really nothing more than the metal float from a toilet tank that someone stuck up there. Before I left here I just wanted to make sure somebody knew that." And with that Phil turned and walked back into the school that will surely miss him as much as he will miss it.