



# NEWSLETTER of the Joliet Township High Schools

## RETIRED TEACHERS

Vol. 60 - September 30, 2022



to

One JTHS Retiree who has continued his interest in his profession after retirement is our honoree for this newsletter issue, **Mike Fiske**. Mike is the director of the Joliet American Legion Band and has recently led them a national championship for the 39<sup>th</sup> time. Mike retired as director of the JT Central band in 2016 after a long and distinguished career as a music educator.

He has led the band program at Joliet East, Morris High School after being RIFed at JT East, Bloomington, Indiana, Indianapolis, Indiana, Morris for a 2<sup>nd</sup> stint and JT Central beginning in 2002. A sax player Mike joined the Legion band and has been its director for 3 years. 2022 was the Joliet's Band return to this national competition after a period of layoff because of the Covid-19 stoppage. There were 4 bands entered in this year's national legion contest from Kansas City, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin and Townanwonda, New York. The contest was held in Milwaukee, WI and the legion band performed 3 pieces for the judging panel in order to be awarded the national title. The Joliet Legion Band and the JTHS Band (now JT Central) were the reason that Joliet was given the title of "City of Champions" by Rabbi Hershman and the All American City Committee. The Joliet Legion Band was formed in 1946 by A.R. (Archie) McAllister, Jr. and Bill Austin who wanted an organization which would enable its members to continue the musical excellence they learned from A. R. McAllister, Sr., the nationally recognized founder and longtime director of the JTHS Band. Legend has it that Archie and Bill got the idea as they were hiding under a ping pong table during a Japanese attack in World War II on an island in the Pacific. The band performs for many community occasions during each year. Amongst those are an annual Christmas concert at the Rialto Square Theatre in Joliet, where the ticket "price" is a donation of nonperishable foods for local food pantries, the opening and closing concerts at the Joliet Bicentennial Theater concerts plus many others. After a long and rewarding teaching career Mike had this to say about his newfound career with a Community Band: "It's been a lot of fun to me to be able to sit in front of the band," Fiske said. "It's a wonderful group of people. I love what they stand for. They're service-oriented, they honor the veterans and they've got a great history. It's been a wonderful opportunity."

### Deaths

- **John David Halbesma**: Born: May 5, 1947 in Aurora, IL: Died: August 18, 2022 in Tampa, FL. , John Halbesma made a name for himself as an athlete in Yorkville, where he attended both elementary and high school. He attended Carthage College in Kenosha, where he played as a defensive lineman until a severe knee injury ended his passion for playing football, then went on to Waubensee Community College. He graduated from Illinois State University, and settled in Joliet, where he taught Industrial Arts and was a Vocational Work Coordinator at Joliet Township High Schools for 34 years. John was an essential member of the National Corvette Restorers Society, a devoted educator & representative in the American Federation of Teachers. After retirement John and his wife, Lorraine, moved to Naples, Florida where they maintained an active life.
- **Philip John Meredith** (Coach) died at his residence in Shell Point Retirement Community at Fort Myers, Florida on Wednesday, August 31, 2022. He was 89. Phil was born in Holland, MI on April 4, 1933. On June 7, 1955, he married Patricia L. Sparks who survives. Upon receiving his degree from King's College in Briarcliff Manor, New York, Phil was immediately drafted into the U.S. Army where he served two years active duty, two years reserve, and two years inactive. Upon his discharge, he became a teacher and a coach where he began mentoring and changing young lives. After receiving his master's degree from the University of Wisconsin, Stout, he became a counselor. After teaching in Dorchester, WI and then Boyceville, WI, he and Pat moved to Hawaii for a year and upon returning to the mainland, continued counseling students at Joliet, IL, district 204, both West and Central campuses, for the next 23 years. Upon retirement, Phil and Pat moved to St. Simon's Island, GA for 23 years where he enjoyed playing golf, driving cars part time, and going on ten short term missions trips to various countries. Phil was also pleased to become an honorary alumni of Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, IL.
- **Frank F. Miller**, 95, of South Haven, Michigan, formerly of Joliet, died on August 1, 2022 at Bronson Hospital, South Haven, Michigan. Frank was born on October 13, 1926 in Lockport, Illinois. He attended Lockport High School, and was senior class president, graduating June 1944. After graduation, Frank joined the Navy. Frank spent the next eighteen months of his military service in the North Atlantic and the Caribbean. He was Honorably Discharged April 9, 1946. Frank then attended U of

I at Champaign-Urbana, graduating with a B.S. degree in Physical Education, June 1950. Frank began teaching at Wilmington High School, Wilmington, IL. He taught there from December 1951 until June 1959 and served as head football coach. Frank then transferred to Joliet Township High School where he taught P.E. and was an assistant football coach through 1964. When West and East Campuses were built, Frank chose Joliet West until his retirement in December 1983. During his tenure, Frank was the head baseball coach, assistant and head football coach. In summers, he served as a lifeguard at Romeo Beach and Joliet Country Club. Frank and his wife, Donna retired in 1984 and moved to a home in Mesa, Arizona. They also had a vacation home in Honolulu, Hawaii where they would vacation each summer. Frank and Donna truly enjoyed their retirement and travelled to locations in the U.S., Canada and Europe. In addition to traveling, Frank and Donna loved Hawaiian music and enjoyed performing before live audiences. Frank played the steel guitar and Donna sang while playing the ukulele. Frank and Donna were invaluable members of the Steel Guitar Community. They helped organize many of the Steel Guitar Conventions and performed for years at the conventions held in Honolulu and Joliet.

- **Marcia Voss**, 73, recently of Sugar Grove, Illinois passed away on September 28<sup>th</sup>. She taught at JT West for over 30 years, first as an English teacher followed by 22 years as a Guidance Counselor before retirement. Marcia was an active member of the Chapel Street Church Mill Creek Campus.

- **Michael R. "Mike"/"Mr. Z"/ Zigrossi**. After a long, difficult battle with many health issues, lifelong Joliet resident Michael R. "Mike" Zigrossi passed away peacefully at Lightways Hospice on June 28, 2022. Mike attended and graduated from Cunningham Grade School (1965), Hufford Jr. High (1967), Joliet Central High School (1971), Lewis (College) now University (1975), Governor's State University (1992) and Lewis University (2007) Mike discovered a love for cooking and preparing food at his first job at Byron's Foods, where he met his best friend, Bert Lilek (who eventually became the owner when Elmer Byron retired). In 2003, Mike and his brother-in-law, Ron Orsini, teamed up and won Best Sauce, Best Ribs and Best Overall at the Naperville Jaycee's Last Fling Amateur Rib cooking contest. After completing his bachelor degree at Lewis, Mike returned to Joliet Central High School as a member of the faculty. He taught Sophomore English and Speech for the next 35 years. He enjoyed his years as class sponsor, especially at homecoming, when he and his students would create winning homecoming floats in his garage. Throughout his many dedicated years, Mike tirelessly directed plays, musicals (alongside the late Robert Howell), contest plays and Children's Theatre productions. He also coached the Speech Team, as well as the Girls and Boys Freshman Soccer teams. Mike's proudest soccer moment was in 2002 when his Freshman boys won the SWSC conference championship after an undefeated season. Always one who stayed active, Mike served as President of the Joliet Drama Guild from 1988-1992. He was a member of the Croatian Cultural Club for many years. A lover of sports, this lifelong Chicago Cubs fan and son Marc were overjoyed to watch their team clinch the National League Pennant at Wrigley Field and then continue on to win the

World Series in 2016. After retirement, he worked at Woodruff Golf Course from 2012-2018. A self-taught musician, Mike sang and played guitar and banjo for many polka and dance bands, including: The Lively Sounds of Ken Juricic, 20 Century Band, The Krystalites, and many others; Union Jack classic rock band; and most recently, he founded Cooler by the Creek country band along with his good friend and fellow teacher, Charles Palia, Jr.

### *And Finally...*

*Always entertaining, the comic strip, "Pickles" by Brian Crane, often is an apt portrayal of retired life. Many of JT retirees can relate to the strip reprinted below.*



The next issue of this newsletter will be published at the end of January, 2022. It will only be available in a PDF version on the JT Web page or mailed to those without internet access who have requested hard copies.

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