



NEWSLETTER of the Joliet Township High Schools

RETIRED TEACHERS

Vol. 55 - January 29, 2021

Karla Guseman, JTHS Superintendent



We were planning to do an article on the newly appointed JTHS Superintendent, Karla Guseman, but because of the pandemic we had to miss one issue of our newsletter in April 2020 and use the September issue to list the 2020 retirees.

We therefore thought that the JT Retirees would enjoy reading about Karla's background as well as what JT is doing on coping with remote learning, when things are possibly going to be more normal and how extra activities like band, orchestra and chorus are handling teaching from a remote location. Born and raised in Joliet, Dr. Guseman began her career in education at Joliet Township High School in 2000 as a science teacher at Joliet Central. She has longtime connections with JT as her grandfather, Charles Woolard, was a teacher, Guidance Counselor and Director of Testing and Special Education at JT Central. Her grandmother, Clairann, was the Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Will County. Karla was named as Curriculum Director for Science and Applied Life in 2006 before being promoted in 2011 to Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services. She was promoted to Superintendent of Joliet Township High School District 204 in February 2020 almost at the beginning of the start of the pandemic and shutdown of in-school classes.

Alice Henderson and Dean Sayles conducted a Zoom interview with Karla. These are the thoughts that Karla expressed in our interview. It should be noted that things are changing rapidly as far as returning to a "normal" situation so some items in the interview may have changed when you read this.

JT is hoping to go back to inbuilding teaching when the minimal transmission of covid-19 is under 5%. As of today we are close to 13%. We still have a ways to go before it's safe. One of the problems with restoring to full inbuilding teaching is that every classroom is a different size. On average using social distancing guidelines, we can only fit 9 or 10 in a classroom with a teacher. That presents some obstacles. There are about 3300 kids at each campus and about 500 staff members. I hope that the disease transmission rate reduces enough so that we can bring kids in. I understand what this is like. I have a senior at Joliet West and I have an 8th grader who is at Troy. I also have an older son who graduated from Joliet Central in 2017. All my kids are remote so I know what that's like. They're doing fine but it is very hard on them. It is very isolating. I look forward to the vaccine roll out and I'm excited that our tutors and our school personnel are at level 1c. I know that it's going to take several weeks to get educators and school personnel the vaccine. We are very fortunate that we were already a one-on-one environment

with the technology for the last decade. All of our students have their computers and all of our staff have their laptops and have had the training in the best way possible. In March it was chaotic but I still think our students did the job when they had to. They put in the a lot of training this past summer. This Fall our class lengths were altered so that the scheduled times are 40 to 45 minutes for class with a 5 or 10 minute "pass" periods between. We had to move one period to an advisory so we now have a 6 period day. The students go from one class right into the next. We try to make sure they are done before 1:00 p.m. so that they could do lunch on their own. We have office hours from 1:00 until 4:00 every day so that the kids can get additional help from their teachers. We have online screen help and also school supplied tutoring for all kids. If students feel they need additional help they just have to sign on. We pay our teachers for the tutoring. That started in November 2020. We are doing some new and interesting things that have staying power after this pandemic is behind us. I don't think that remote or hybrid learning will replace the benefits of inperson instruction for the majority of students. So I can't wait until we get back with kids. We can't have learning without teachers. Our teachers have been fantastic. They are allowed to teach from the building but they can also teach from home. An interesting thing for many of our staff right now is that they have their own school age kids who are home. So who is watching or supervising the kids. If they are under 13 there still probably has to be an adult in the house. That's a situation we've had to solve - so they can teach from home or from the classroom - whichever works for them. We are really fortunate that we have great relations with our unions. We work hand in hand to make sure everybody understands the plans. It's the way the relationship is supposed to work so I'm very glad we have the relationship that we do with all of our unions - transportation, teachers, everyone. There are certain areas like Foreign Language, music, band, orchestra and chorus that are doing things differently. As to what's happening in the various areas of the curriculum. I think everybody's doing things differently. We've purchased things to add but we have been able to use the technology already in place in most cases. With the CARES money we received we ended up buying supplementary resources to help various areas. In music we bought some technology so that the students could easily record singing or playing and then upload it so that teachers could then give feedback. In Foreign Language we bought ABLA that is specifically for Spanish but will also have a French version. We bought simulations for welding. So we are trying to find things that will support students and teachers in this environment that we now face. We bought our culinary teachers some video equipment so that they could work in their homes and put videos above their stoves so that the kids could still watch their demonstrations. There's probably not a single area where we didn't purchase things to help. In math courses there are a lot of online

JTHS Web Page Update

For those readers of the Retired Teacher's and Staff Newsletter on line here's the new location on the JTHS web page:

www.JTHS.org *then* Quick Links *then* Alumni
then Get Involved *then* JTHS Retired Faculty

Links located at the top of the page on pull down tabs.
Newsletter from the past 3 years are located on this page.

(cont. from page 1)

practice and drills that the teachers are utilizing. Everyone is getting really good at Zoom. For Zoom sessions we purchased a version where you can put your classroom into breakout rooms. So as a science teacher, for instance, the teacher could assign students to a lab room and I could have a discussion with the other students about things and then we could come back together. Sometimes in order to get kids to get caught up for graduation we would tell them that could take 2 correspondence classes. We purchased our own software called APEX and we are hiring our own teachers to work with the students. They can do that assistance outside the school day to be able get back on track. I think that there are things that are going to come from this situation that are going to make us better. Education moves at a glacier's pace as far as changes. I think we have learned that these changes will enable us to move more quickly in certain instances. I don't want to be leading the pandemic life forever. I think it was Winston Churchill who said, "never let a good crisis go to waste" and so as we find that if there's a problem we are trying to come up with a solution.

As far as performing areas, I think one of the huge losses last year was the cancellation of the Central Band's appearance at Carnegie Hall. My husband and I had our tickets purchased, air fare, hotel room, etc. and we had to cancel. I think there are certain areas that have been hit harder than others. My older son is actually in culinary school, so living with a culinary student, we are actually eating very well. But he's decided to change his direction because the culinary field has been hit so hard. JTHS is ahead of the curve with our technology. We were just able to double our bandwidth over the Winter break. I think we're in a real good place when we move into a hybrid model. We're in a good place and there are a lot of things we have in our favor, but we've got to get the kids back in school.

Deaths

• **Mary Ann Bennington**, recently of Bourbonnais, formerly of Chicago and New Lenox, Illinois passed away Sunday, September 27, 2020 at the age of 90. She was preceded in death by her loving and devoted husband Joseph W. Bennington on February 25, 2012 a long time English teacher at JTHS and JT West. Mary Ann retired after 25 years as Librarian from Joliet Central High campus. Mary Ann and her husband Joe enjoyed many trips both domestic and international. They loved opening their home and hearts to many guests over the years. Mary Ann had a gift of listening and being genuinely interested in those around her which endeared her to them. After retirement the Benningtons moved to Chicago where Joe became an Andy Frain usher at the Auditorium theater. This allowed them to enjoy their long love of Broadway musicals and concerts. They were long time active members of the Church of the Nazarene.

• **William H. Edwards (Bill)** passed away at the age of 93 Sunday morning, October 4, 2020 at the Joliet Area Community Hospice. He was born on December 8, 1926 in Granite City, IL and raised in Staunton, IL where he met and married his high school sweetheart, Marian. They were married on September 7, 1950 and were soul mates for 68 years. Bill attended the University of Illinois and received his Bachelor's Degree from St. Louis University, playing basketball for both colleges. At the U of Illinois he was a member of the famous basketball "Whiz Kids". Bill received his Master's Degree from the Peabody School of Education at Vanderbilt University. He proudly served his country in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, honorably discharged at the rank of Corporal. The Edwards family moved to Joliet in 1966. Bill taught and coached at Staunton High School, Litchfield High School, Lincoln-Way High School and Joliet Township High Schools. A majority of his years were teaching History and Dean of Students at Joliet Township High Schools. Many students at JT fondly remember Dean Edwards. He coached baseball and was the varsity basketball coach at JT West for many years. He was an exemplary role model who impacted many lives through his knowledge and guidance.

• **Janet Mae Swank** (nee Soderberg) a longtime Joliet resident passed away Thursday, November 19, 2020 age 86 years. She was the wife of Roger Swank, a longtime track coach at Joliet West who recently passed away. Janet is survived by her four children, Kent, Van, Lee and Darlene. Lee is a teacher at JT Central. Janet was a founding and lifetime member of Southfield Church (previously Bethel Baptist) faithfully and joyfully greeting every soul that walked through the church's doors. Janet was administrative assistant to the owner of Joliet Valves until her retirement in 1999. She also worked at Elmendorf Air Force Base and Bethel College and Seminary.

JTHS Foundation News

JTHS Foundation executive board meetings have been held by Zoom since the March 2020 shutdown. The Trivia event for 2021, usually held in March, has been cancelled. The Wadsworth golf outing scheduled for June will hopefully still take place. Fundraising for most organizations has been at a standstill. However, since the Foundation is still earning money from its trust funds, scholarships of \$42,550 will be awarded to JTHS students in May of 2021. There were no student/teacher grants this year but the emergency funds of \$3000 were given by the Foundation to the principals for students in need. Plaques and bricks can be still be ordered through the Foundation website.

ON GETTING OLDER

- When you are dissatisfied and would like to go back to youth, think of Algebra.
- First you forget names, then you forget faces. Then you forget to pull up your zipper... it's worse when you forget to pull it down.

The next issue of this newsletter will be published at the end of April, 2021. 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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