

Mr. Matt N. Vanni embodied the pride and spirit of a Negaunee Miner throughout his life as a student, athlete, teacher, and member of our community. NPS is proud to welcome him as one of this year's inductees into the NPS Hall of Fame.

Matt Nestor Vanni, born in Negaunee in 1909, started his journey with NPS at the Park Street School as a Finnish-speaking kindergartner. From the start, his determination was tested as he was challenged with learning the English language at school. Matt also had to contend with the prejudices and stigma of being left-handed in that era, working hard to prove his worth to teachers, garnering confidence from peers through his humor and vigor. Those early school experiences are said to have fueled his aspirations to become a teacher and perhaps shaped his no-frills teaching style. In high school, Matt proved to be a talented multi-sport high school athlete, and helped the Miners earn the 1927 Boys Basketball Class 'A' U.P. State Championship his senior year. After graduating from NHS, he went to work as a sawmill lumberjack near Big Bay, earning money for his college education. His perseverance, combined with a \$75 athletic scholarship, eventually led to his enrollment at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois to study Industrial Arts. There, Matt lettered in four sports as a college freshman, served as Student Council President, and was named "Man of the Year" as a senior before earning his Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education in 1932. Later in life, he earned his Master's degree from the University of Michigan, working as a miner at the "Mather B" during his summer breaks to pay for his tuition.

After college, Mr. Vanni returned to his hometown and secured work as a substitute teacher locally, before being hired by NPS to teach Industrial Arts in 1934. Over the course of the next four decades, Mr. Vanni's name became synonymous with Industrial Arts among students, staff, and the community. Inside his classroom in the Manual Training Building, Mr. Vanni's students developed valuable, hands-on mechanical and technical skills that led to many of them finding life-long, successful careers in the trades. In addition, Mr. Vanni taught life lessons through his signature "old-school" teaching style to classes full of students who thrived in that type of learning environment, where creativity and problem-solving mattered more than text-book memorization. As a master craftsman, Mr. Vanni also served as the head of the NPS Industrial Arts department, managing the district's maintenance program for nearly 25 years. Over his storied career, he shared the joy of woodworking and trade skills across multiple generations of Negaunee families. His dedication to teaching extended well beyond the traditional classroom; he was a leader with the Boy Scouts of America, taught building trades and home construction courses in night school for 20 years, was a local referee and coach for track, baseball, basketball, and football at both NHS and St. Paul's school for a combined 30 years. Mr. Vanni retired from NPS in 1974 with more than forty years of service to the students of Negaunee; his tenure remains one of the longest in District history. His strong commitment to NPS was evident in aspects of service, education, and community.

Outside of the school walls, Matt's spirit of community and service defined his civic life. He served on the Negaunee City Council for seven years and was elected Mayor in 1966, overseeing the introduction of natural gas to the area. In his retirement, he continued to be a staple in the community. Whether leading from the mayor's desk or greeting fans at Miner athletic events as a ticket taker, Matt approached every civic duty with an infectious enthusiasm and an unwavering love for his hometown. He frequently volunteered his master woodworking talents for local construction projects including the "Keys to the City," built beautiful Christmas displays for the Breiting Hotel, and crafted the VFW "Flanders Field" Memorial Day tributes. From orchestrating annual Elks Christmas parties and personally delivering gift baskets to neighbors in need, his life was an example of service and resolve.

Through his lifetime, Mr. Matt Vanni remained humble and preferred to let his hands and his service do the talking, with one exception; when he spoke of his hometown. There was never a question of his pride in the Maize and Blue. The mark that Mr. Matt Vanni's legacy left on Negaunee Public Schools is evident today through the continuation of a strong industrial arts program at NHS, and the memories of his loyal devotion to the Negaunee community and school system. The District is proud to honor him with this recognition and will forever be grateful for his commitment to excellence. Congratulations to the late Mr. Matt Vanni and his family.