

Teacher gives longevity lesson

By Dale Huffman, Dayton Daily News

COMMENTARY

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He has touched the lives of thousands of school children in the Miami Valley during the past 61 years, most of them while teaching at West Carrollton High School.

Murl E. Huffman signed a contract with the West Carrollton school board in September for the 58th year in a row. It is thought to be a record in classroom longevity.

He teaches social studies, and is on the substitute teacher roster now, but says, "seems as if I am always at school. But I can tell you this — I love it."

Some of his grateful students will be taking Murl to a special dinner Monday evening to celebrate his 84th birthday.

"I hit the 84 mark on Dec. 29," he said. "But I am blessed with good health, and get out every day and bike from my cottage at Bethany Retirement Village to the Dorothy Lane Market to pick up a New York Times."

Murl said he still treasures each day in a classroom. "I am proud to say that I consider it a joy to work with the young people," he said. "And I am not bragging, but I can tell you I am amazed the respect they give me. These kids are out of this world."

Rusty Clifford, superintendent of West Carrollton schools says Murl is "absolutely incredible. He is legendary. I wouldn't be surprised if he has not had more classroom hours than any teacher in the state."

Clifford said, "He never says no when he is called to sub. He looks and acts far younger than his age. And he is so reliable. I can say he is revered and loved by the staff and the students."

He added, "I stood outside his room one day and I listened and he is just amazing. He has such rapport with the students. He knows just what to say, how to say it, how to get through to them. He's an amazing educator."

Murl Huffman (no relation to your columnist) says he still has every grade book from six decades of teaching, and many of his students have stayed in touch over the years.

Murl lost his wife, Charlotte, in 1999, so he does all the cooking, the cleaning, and the housework in addition to a good deal of substitute teaching. "I go to Chicago when I am able, where I have family," he said. "I have two sons and a daughter and we stay in touch. That, along with my association with the young people at school, keeps me young."

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Donna Tudor Johnson, who graduated from West Carrollton High in 1955 said that Murl is, by far, the most memorable teacher she can remember.

"It seems he knows and remembers each student he has ever taught," Donna said. "He respected us and liked us for who we are. He was a strict teacher in some ways and always assigned homework. I still remember one thing so well. I was tall and he always told me to get my shoulders back and be proud of my height. He is just a wonderful man and has always had a beautiful smile for everyone."

At one time Murl served as president of the Ohio Education Association, and he was responsible for revamping the school's annual graduation ceremony back in the early 1960s after there was a bit of rowdiness at a commencement.

"I democratized the ceremony," he said. "I invited the students to vote on how they wanted the ceremony to be held, and who they wanted to take part. They voted on who would speak. It seemed to work and our ceremonies since then have gone well."

Murl said he likes to go mountain biking at times, and plays golf occasionally.

"Last few years I have been taking organ lessons," he said, with joy in his voice. "Sometimes my friends or former students call and ask me to play them a tune on the phone."

Murl said he has great faith in the young people of today. "They are neat. Sometimes they challenge us, but that is what they should do. If they are not pushing to the edge, what kind of leaders will they be? I don't see that the children are any different than they were 50 years ago. They are the greatest."

He loves what he does and hopes to continue as long as his services are requested.

"It's my life," he said. "I'd much rather be doing this than volunteering some place pushing a wheel chair around. That's important. But my kids are more important to me."