

Jim Ennis Sr. Shares Lifetime of Memories as Wysox Resident and Towanda Educator



As a teacher at Towanda Area High School from 1960 to 1989, Jim Ennis, Sr. surely touched the lives of students from two distinctly different generations. As a longtime resident of Wysox Township, his private life and his ventures into other businesses provided the spice of variety and memories that continue to bring a smile to his face.

Ennis was always a hard worker, working at the Stroehman Bakery in Williamsport from the age of 14. After graduating from Williamsport High School, he attended Lycoming College and Elmira College, garnering his teaching certificate and Master's degrees in education, biology and history. He was inspired by several teachers whom he had admired as a youth.

His first teaching job, that of a history teacher in Towanda, would define his career as an educator, but Ennis's penchant for dabbling in farming, real estate, storage and trucking introduced him to the larger community and helped him to forge long-lasting partnerships and friendships. He was known by many as the Kingfish, a reference to a character on the old Amos & Andy television show known for his nonstop wheeling and dealing.

He bought and sold storage units in the area behind the current Sherwood Groves and opened E&B Lumber Company, a saw mill on Sullivan. He started Ennis Trucking, which provided interstate household relocation services and delivery of appliances ordered by local residents through the Sears catalog store with a 26-foot moving van.

Fellow teachers, including Frank Hoffman, Ray Hoffman, George Karschner, Charlie Space, and Bill Victory, as well as their sons, often assisted Ennis with deliveries.

He bought several apartment houses, starting with a building on Pine Street in Towanda that he still owns. A Chinese restaurant is currently situated on the first floor where Mike Brutzman once ran the Soup & Sandwich Deli.

Ennis lived briefly with his wife, Dorothy in an apartment above a dress factory that was situated next to the former Quick & Jennings grocery store on Route 6.

In 1962, shortly after their first son, Jim Ennis, Jr. was born, the family purchased one of the oldest homes in Wysox, and iconic mansion along Route 6 that was built in 1828 and once featured a large carriage step and three hitching posts out front.



The family moved into the first floor of the house, also raising daughter Teresa and second son, Tim, there. Numerous people have rented the second floor of the home over the years, including former Towanda School District Superintendent and athletic coach Don Butler and shop teacher Bill Means.

Ennis admits that, when he came to teach in the area, he actually preferred biology over history. "That's what was available at the time," Ennis recalls, noting that he got a break from history for one school year in the late 1970s when he had the opportunity to fill in for a biology teacher on sabbatical.

Looking back on his teaching career, Ennis cites two significant changes in his 28 ½ years at the front of the classroom, the building of the current high school and the beginning of middle school in Towanda and the diminishing authoritative role of educators as a wave of protectionism of students rolled across America and into Bradford County in the 1970s and '80s.

"Discipline went to hell over the years," Ennis laments. Paddling of students was all but forbidden in the new high school, Ennis remembers, and the few times that he deemed a swift whack on the behind of a misbehaving student justified, parents expressed their disapproval.

Nonetheless, Ennis continued to see potential in each new class of students to move up the hill to the high school. On the other side of the naughty and nice spectrum, Ennis was known to don a Santa suit at Christmas time, making appearances at holiday programs, visiting grade school students and welcoming children to Christmas parties held by the Towanda Lions Club, of which he has served as a member and fundraiser for more than 40 years.

In the years leading up to his retirement, more of Ennis's students were children of the students he had taught in the 1960s, and Ennis is humbled by those who take time to reintroduce themselves to him when he and Dorothy are out shopping or dining.

Confident that he had satisfied his calling as an educator, Ennis took a decided break from the school upon his retirement, noting that he was one of few former school employees who never returned as a substitute teacher. He viewed his retirement as an opportunity to devote more attention to his other business endeavors, which included his transport business and managing a small herd of cows.

In the early 1970s, the Ennis's acquired a half dozen cows and calves from Willis Jennings in Asylum Township and kept them in a small pasture and lean-to barn at the rear of his Wysox property, at the base of a stand of cedar trees that are still there. Large gardens provided the family with plenty of fresh produce, including the ingredients for Ennis's favorite Italian dishes.

The cattle herd grew to about 38 head that were moved to the Sherman Barnes farm above Lake Wesauking. Ennis sold the cows while he was still teaching. Ennis Trucking is now closed, after being run for some years by Jim, Jr.

Ennis credits the "good people" of Wysox for many years of success and happiness in the township. He laments that progress has dramatically changed the pace of life along "The Golden Mile" from a time when Clark Furniture actually stood out as a business among a vibrant neighborhood of residences facing Route 6.

Ennis chuckles at the thought that his family's home has acquired a legacy of its own for its Christmas decorations. He and Dorothy related that decorating the large house began modestly when Jim, Jr. and Teresa proposed putting up a Santa Claus and reindeer one year. They credit the vast expansion of the repertoire of lighted figurines to Tim, who seems intent

on maintaining the tradition, despite losing part of the collection in the 2011 flood.