

2016 ISD 88 Hall of Fame

Henry Epp – Teacher 1952-1982

Henry, “Hank,” Epp was a man with a humble and challenging beginning. Born in 1922 in Cottonwood, County, Minnesota, Hank lost his mother six months after his birth, his father five years later. This was in the heart of The Depression and times were tough. Hank and four of his siblings moved into the one-room apartment above a relative’s grocery store and exchanged work for rent and food. Later, he and his brother Ruben lived with relatives. During this time they had the Mountain Lake paper route and they often had to place cardboard in their shoes to cover the holes so they could deliver the papers. This type of upbringing does not typically nurture the growth of a remarkable person, but Hank was anything but typical.

Hank went from serving our country in the navy during World War II to becoming an All-American basketball player at Mankato State to teaching at Tracy High School in Tracy, Minnesota. In 1952, Hank began teaching industrial arts at New Ulm High School. In the 1970’s he studied in California for two summers, training to develop a cutting edge electronics curriculum. For thirty years, Hank taught industrial arts and electronics in New Ulm.

Hank was dedicated, working with every student individually to prepare them for life in the real world. Since his popular class was overloaded, he picked up extra sessions and arrived early in the morning to make himself available to his students. He cared about each and every one of his students and they respected and admired him in return.

Hank and his wife Elvira also showed their love for children by becoming foster parents to 21 teenagers from 1968 – 1981. They were given children that were deemed difficult to care for. Hank and Elvira mentored these teenagers with high expectations for their behavior. Hank told each of them: “You will be trusted completely until I have a reason not to trust you.” Hank and Elvira turned the future of these young people from bleak to hopeful.

Hank served in the United States military for twenty years, ten years in the Navy and ten years in the Army as Commander of the New Ulm National Guard 125th Field Artillery. After his military retirement, Hank remained on the National Guard Citizen’s Committee. He was an active United Church of Christ board member and served on the Union Hospital Board of Directors, Hank received the Sertoma International Service to Mankind Award and the Mankato State University Distinguished Alumni Humanitarian Award.

Hank was a humble man, not willing to talk about his accomplishments and personal experiences. He deserves to be honored by the citizens of New Ulm. People like Hank are rare. Although he is gone, his legacy lives on in the lives he touched.

