

Salem-Keizer's first female HS principal remembered at Celebration of Leadership

BY MARY LOUISE VANNATTA
For the Keizertimes

McNary High School Principal Erik Jespersen knew he had “big heels to fill” when taking on the job.

He was talking about the school’s former leader, Kathleen Hanneman, who served at McNary from 1981 to 1987, serving as the first female high school principal in the Salem-Keizer School District.

Friends and colleagues gathered at McNary on Wednesday, Oct. 6, for a “Celebration of Leadership” to remember Hanneman, who died of cancer on Sept. 23, 2020. Postponed because of COVID, the memorial service recognized her longtime career with the district.

Members of the Junior ROTC greeted guests as they entered the high school. They could hear the song *Teach Your Children Well* by Crosby Stills & Nash.

Jespersen said about the former principal, “She had a disarming way of distilling wisdom into you every day. She made us all better leaders.”

In addition to McNary, Hanneman also was a teacher and principal at Hillcrest Correctional Facility, North Salem High assistant principal, principal at Walker Middle School and



Erik Jespersen, McNary High School principal, shows the plaque that will honor the late Kathleen Hanneman, the school's former principal. Photo by MARY LOUISE VANNATTA

Judson Middle School and served in several other administrator roles in the district.

“Kathleen was one of the most humble people I have ever met. She truly exhibited humility — and not just for show,” said Salam Noor, former Oregon Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction. “Though she was a teacher, she was also a learner, even after

decades of experience. She focused on others and what they needed to be successful. She was patient and supportive of the people she worked with, and she could get things done without a lot of fuss. That was due to her character, honesty, style, depth of knowledge and experience, and her focus on what really mattered — the students.”

Nanci Schneider, a former district

administrator, said Hanneman was wise and had many memorable sayings. One included, “Some parents prepare the path of life for their children; others prepare their children for the path of life.”

Keizer leader Mary Bauer Opra recognized Hanneman for her influence on the Keizer community. Both she and Hanneman were Keizer First Citizens, even though Hanneman didn’t live in Keizer. In 1982, when Keizer became an incorporated city, Hanneman opened McNary up for the first city council meetings.

“Attacking lethargy” was one of Hanneman’s strong characteristics, said former legislator, coach, and teacher Vic Backlund.

Charlotte Sachtjen recognized Hanneman for helping encourage and support women. “She walked with integrity,” Sachtjen added.

To close, family members had a chance to share a few personal stories. Husband Craig acknowledged that McNary was the perfect venue to pay tribute to the career of his wife of 46 years. Their daughter Molly Horton concluded that her mother valued grit. She often reminded Molly that “life is chock full of challenges, and we all get slammed by adversity.”

In her honor, George Dyer, also a former Salem-Keizer School District Administrator, presented a plaque to Jespersen and McNary High School.

Hanneman is survived by husband Craig Hanneman, daughters Molly and Annie, son Paul, and three grandchildren.

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