

# 'It's About the Kids'...Jack Dehring Ends 34-Year School Term

## Legacy Measured in Students' Success

By Ryan Schlehuber

It has never been in Jack Dehring's character to seek admiration or public attention for his efforts at Mackinac Island Public School. For 34 years he has served as a teacher, principal, and, more recently, as superintendent, and when he retires in July, he says his accomplishments will be reflected in his students.

"This has never been about me, and this here [the story] is not all about me," said Mr. Dehring in an interview. "It is about the kids. If I were to have a legacy, it would be how I have affected the kids."

He is known as a no-nonsense, down-to-business teacher, and when class is in session, school secretary Barb Fisher and others on the staff know he doesn't care for interruptions.

On the other hand, said high school senior Melissa Bunker, he makes learning fun and he is more than just a teacher to his students.

"We were always doing something fun every day," she said. "We'd either be doing labs or he would use some kind of

props with his lecture. He was dedicated and loyal to his work and he made learning exciting for us."

When Mr. Dehring departs from the school, not only will his dedication to student education and well-being be missed, so will his knowledge of the school's history over the last three decades.

Originally from Baroda, a small community in southwest Michigan, he remembers arriving for the first time on the Island 34 years ago, on a Sunday, for an interview with Superintendent William Krieger. He greeted his new students two days later as the high school science teacher.

He remembers the metal cabinet in his classroom that stored all of the laboratory equipment, and a leaky bottle of acid that ruined much of that equipment, leaving his students with little to experiment with that year.

He remembers a small library, no bigger than his office, the teachers lounge now used as Lance Greenlee's classroom, and the Lakers home games in the school's tiny gymnasium, where most spectators stood against the



After 34 years at Mackinac Island Public School, Jack Dehring, the school superintendent for the past two years, announced he will retire this summer. Most of his years at the school have been as a high school science and technology teacher.

wall, or listened from out in the hall. It is used today as a cafeteria and multi-purpose room.

Mr. Dehring also remembers the students who have walked the long hallway in the school and has seen many of them advance from kindergarten through their senior year, all under one roof.

He is retiring as a superintendent, but always considered himself a teacher.

"I still do," he said.

Teaching is in the Dehring family's bloodline. His grandmother, Lillian Dehring, taught class in a one-room schoolhouse near St. Joseph., and his sister, Sharon Foxworthy, is an elementary teacher at Stevensville Lakeshore. Both his children are in education, as well. Sarah Dehring is the physical education teacher here and is preparing to

move to Yuma, Arizona. His son, Jack III, is teaching middle school in Evanston, Illinois.

Typical of a small school, Mr. Dehring has served in several capacities at Mackinac Island Public School. In addition to administration, he has taught science, mathematics, technological studies, and English, served as the athletic director, and coached golf and girls basketball.

In 1974, he led the girls basketball team to the Class D championship, the first district title in the school's history. He was the last to coach a girls basketball team for the Lakers, as the sport was replaced by co-ed soccer in the early 1990s.

Most notable change he has seen since he began teaching here is the number of students going on to college, which he attributes to parental concern.

"More parents want their children to go to college now," he said. "My first year here, very, very few students went onto college."

Even though graduating classes here are small, usually

less than 10, Mr. Dehring proudly boasts that most now pursue higher education.

He has been proud of each student he taught and said he hopes that each one remembers that he, their school, and their community still expect them to be useful to society.

School board trustee Paul Wandrie, one of the four board members who were former students of Mr. Dehring's, said his qualities as a teacher will be missed at the school.

"We'll miss him a lot just for what he knows about the school," Mr. Wandrie said, "but he will still be our friend and he'll still be there as a community member. He was an excellent teacher who always helped you understand what he was teaching. He was always fair. He never let anyone fall behind."

Another former student serving on the school board, Sara Chambers, credits Mr. Dehring with her success in high school.

"I will always remember Jack as a great teacher and a good friend," she said. "I probably never would have made it through algebra without him. He has done a great job for the Mackinac Island Public School."

"He cares for the students very much," said board member Trish Martin, who taught high school science in the mid-1980s. "He cared for them not just as students but as people, too. The students respected him a lot for that."

"He was always there for you, whether it was school-related or not," said Miss Bunker.

Mr. Dehring plans only to enjoy his leisure time during retirement, but said he will be available as a substitute teacher if the school needs one.

"Obviously, the one thing I'll miss the most is the kids," he said. "They're my kids, and I'm proud of all of them."

## Dehring Announces Retirement

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"Quite frankly, I'm speechless," said Trustee Jason St. Onge.

Mr. Dehring has been with the school for 34 years, with most of those years spent teaching high school science. He was hired as the superintendent in 2004, replacing Gary Urman, who took the superintendent job at Boyne Falls. Mr. Dehring also served as superintendent for Mackinac Island Public Schools briefly in the mid-1980s and again in the 1990s.

Four members of the seven-member school board were, at one time, a student of Mr. Dehring's. His daughter, Sarah, is the school's physical education teacher, and his son, Jack Jr., is a teacher in Illinois. His wife,

Dorothy, was treasurer for the City of Mackinac Island from 1992 to 2005.

"It's sad to see him go," said Trustee Sara Chambers about her former teacher.

Mr. Dehring told the board that, under state law, he cannot be affiliated with any school-related issues until 30 days after July 1 and, therefore, cannot serve on a superintendent search committee. He said he is not even allowed to visit the school. He suggested that the board consider hiring Ken Drenth of Cedarville as a consultant for the committee. Mr. Drenth is a former superintendent at Les Cheneaux Community Schools in Cedarville and also worked for the Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District.

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