

Henry J. Furrie

1921-1998

RESPECTED COACH AND TEACHER



(Most of the text was taken from Mr. Furrie's obituary published in the Post Gazette in September of 1998 and written by former Gateway Gator Rick Shrum.)

Henry J. Furrie didn't have to see the movie "Patton." He lived it. Mr. Furrie served under the legendary General George Patton for four years during World War II. "Henry was a forward observer," said Jeanne Furrie, Mr. Furrie's wife of 49 years. "General Patton didn't trust the guys in between, so he often talked to Henry directly. That's how Henry learned to swear." That, apparently, also is where Mr. Furrie developed and fine-tuned some of the leadership and disciplinary qualities he used during his lengthy career as an educator, which was spent mostly in the Gateway School District.

Like Patton -"Old Blood and Guts"- Mr. Furrie was known for his tough, no-nonsense demeanor. But the burly ex-soldier with the short, white hair had a warmth that ingratiated him with students.

"Henry and his wife didn't have children, but every child in the Gateway School District

was his son and daughter,” said Paul Holzshu, Gateway’s current athletic director and a 1967 graduate of the high school. “There wasn’t anything that happened in this school – athletically, academically, socially – that Henry wasn’t hands-on involved. He bled black and gold.” Larry Hanley saw that firsthand. Hanley was Gateway’s athletic director from 1973 to 1995. He learned about sports administration from Mr. Furrie.

“Henry was the quintessential definition of tough love,” Hanley said. “He was tough on students, but he loved them, and was very popular among them. Today, so many years after they’ve been out of high school, people still talk about Henry Furrie.”

“He was a disciplinarian,” Paul Holzshu agreed. “You knew when ‘The Hammer’ came around the corner and barked your name, you were in deep, deep trouble.” Randy Rovesti had little time for trouble. He competed in football, baseball and wrestling for the Gators, and he knew Mr. Furrie well.

“He was tough, demanding, but he also treated you with respect and gave you a pat on the back if you needed it,” said Rovesti, a 1970 graduate and principal of Norwin Middle School East. “He’s what education should be all about. I think he touched a ton of lives.” A native of Ellsworth, Washington County, Mr. Furrie was one of six children. He joined the U.S. Army after high school and served in Europe. Though he was wounded in one leg, he turned down a purple heart.

“I asked him, and he said he was on his way to the latrine when he was hit,” Mrs. Furrie said.

Mr. Furrie graduated from Waynesburg College and later earned degrees from Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh. He taught and coached football at Freeport High School in the 1940s, moved on to Braddock Junior-Senior High in the early 1950s, then to Monroeville Junior High in the mid-1950s, and to the newly formed Gateway High in 1958.

Mr. Furrie also officiated high school football and swimming. He is a member of the East Boroughs Chapter of the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame. One of his proudest moments came in 1996 when a group of former athletes and students approached Mr. Furrie about starting the Henry J. Furrie Scholarship Fund in his honor. The purpose of the organization is to award annual scholarships to male and female students from Gateway Senior High School who participated in athletics with good academic credentials and who exhibit financial need. The scholarship must be used to seek out a degree of higher education pointed toward a career of their choice.