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Monday, July 3, 2017
 Hoopeston's only locally-owned daily news publication!
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Hornbeck leads last meeting, last day as head of HA schools

When Hank Hornbeck attended a special Hoopeston Area board meeting Thursday evening, there was something different about him.

Normally quiet and thoughtful, at Thursday's meeting, he smiled more, made more small talk and the twinkle in his eye was as obvious as the new growth of facial hair on his chin.

The weight of being superintendent of Hoopeston Area schools was about to shift from his shoulders and it showed.

Friday was Hornbeck's last day at the helm of the district. In his office, nearly all vestiges of his personality - the Cubs memorabilia, pictures, awards - had already been removed earlier in the week. All that remained were electronic devices and a box of small things to be taken home when Hornbeck left for lunch. He planned to play hooky in the afternoon.

Hornbeck spent 33 years in education, first as a science teacher at Rossville Junior High School. There, he met his wife, Tammy, who retired from the Rossville district three years ago.

Next, he taught and coached at Armstrong High School, where then-Supt. Byron Wise encouraged him to go into administration.

But it was at Hoopeston that Hornbeck would spend the bulk of his career - 23 years - as teacher, coach, principal and, for the past 10 years, superintendent.

As Wise was a mentor from his teaching days, at Arm-



HORNBECK

strong, Hornbeck found another mentor in Don Dean, also a former teacher, principal and superintendent, who also encouraged Hornbeck to go into administration.

As Hornbeck worked on those credentials, Dean retired and Mark Conolly, then high school principal, was promoted to superintendent. He served until his unexpected death in December 2006.

Dean returned to lead the district as a superintendent search began. After a national search, Hornbeck was selected and moved from high school principal to superintendent.

Dean stayed on as the district business manager during part of Hornbeck's tenure. Their relationship continues. Even in Dean's retirement, he visited Hornbeck and gave advice when asked.

"He's a good man," Hornbeck said.

Another mainstay of his early superintendence was secretary Betty Richards, who also served in that role for Dean and Conolly. "She made my life very easy when I became superintendent," he said.

As principal, Hornbeck said he dealt with day-to-day phone calls, including upset parents, and spent much time "putting out fires." As superintendent, there was less involvement with parents and students and more with his nemesis: the state.

As superintendent, one of Hornbeck's jobs was to stay on top of district finances, no small feat in Illinois. "Mr. Conolly used to talk about the missing (state aid) pay-

See HORNBECK on other side

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From the Blotter

Escaped juveniles arrested in Hoopeston

A 15-year-old Hoopeston boy and a 16-year-old Milford boy were arrested in Hoopeston after escaping custody from a Kankakee facility.

Hornbeck continued from other side

ment,” Hornbeck said. “Now there are several. You start losing count after a while.”

In earning his administrative credentials, Hornbeck learned about school finance using hypothetical numbers, but as head of a school district, “they’re your numbers, they’re real numbers and they affect real people.”

The state and its resulting red tape “has been my biggest frustration over the years,” he added.

On the flip side, his favorite part of the job has been the people, especially the littlest people in his district. Hornbeck said he enjoyed visiting with the little kids. They gave him hugs, which “always made my day.”

Hornbeck told the story of a little girl who was not a fan of a mustache he had grown and said so. When she saw him next, the girl said, “Mr. Hornbeck, you’re still growing your mustache,” in a disapproving tone, Hornbeck said, laughing.

Teachers, administrators and staff also rank high on his list. “These people I work with here are pretty great,” he said.

The district has changed much during Hornbeck’s time here. A big change has been technology. “In the ‘80s, I didn’t have a computer in my classroom,” he said. Now, each student has a Chromebook. He nodded at a filing cabinet in his office, which hasn’t been used much since electronic documents became popular.

The closing of Honeywell is another change, one that is mostly finished. The building has been mostly emptied and John Greer and the middle school are ready for the change in grade levels. Hornbeck suggested there will be some glitches but those will be easily solved.

People have changed over the years, too, coming and going. Don Dean is retired. Betty Richards is now a secretary at her church.

A recent change has left a hole in Hornbeck’s life. The May 17 death of Brian Hodge, teacher, athletic director and Hornbeck’s friend, rocked the district and will have a

lasting effect. “We will miss him,” Hornbeck said. “The kids will miss him.”

Authorities allege the boys stole a truck that they drove to Hoopeston. When approached, one juvenile fled and the other surrendered.

The Milford boy was transferred to Iroquois County while the Hoopeston youth was taken to the Vermilion County Juvenile Detention Facility on order from the probation department.

In other police news:
A black and silver iPhone was found at 6 a.m. Thursday. The owner may identify and claim it at the police station.

Douglas Land, 55, of Hoopeston, was arrested after police were called at 2:11 p.m. Thursday to the 100 block of West Main for an intoxicated person.

Land was charged with unlawful acts constituting disorderly conduct and was released on a notice to appear in Hoopeston City Court.

Richard Strawser, 30, of Hoopeston, was arrested after a traffic stop at 4:20 p.m. Thursday at North Ninth Ave. and West McCracken. He was charged with driving while license revoked and released on a notice to appear

in Vermilion County traffic court.
A 15-year-old Paxton boy was arrested at 7:36 p.m. Thursday in the 100 block of West Penn. Wanted on a Ford County warrant, the boy was released to a guardian.

Police are investigating a hit-and-run accident reported at 6:10 p.m. Friday in the 700 block of South Sixth Ave., after a Hoopeston woman returned home and found her vehicle had been struck.

Lanie Inglis, 21, of Hoopeston, was arrested after police were called at 4:21 a.m. Saturday to Parkview Court for a fight. She was charged with battery and trespassing and released on a notice to appear in Hoopeston City Court.

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While each new position taught him things, some of the education system was not a surprise to Hornbeck as his father, Henry, was also in the field, serving as Milford Township High School superintendent in the 1980s.

The job is not the only similarity between father and son. Henry Anthony Hornbeck passed his name on to his son, Hank, who carried on the tradition with his son, known as Anthony. The line continues to a sixth Henry Anthony Hornbeck.

Anthony Hornbeck was recently named Chicago area sales manager for Watchfire Signs.

Hornbeck’s daughter, Jordan Hollingsworth, has been a fourth grade teacher at Honeywell but has resigned and is moving to Tolono.

While he’s stepping out of his role as superintendent, Hornbeck is not stepping out of the community. “We don’t plan on going anywhere,” he said.

Officially retired, Hornbeck is looking to do things he enjoys. “I’ve been employed the last 33 years,” the 55-year-old Hornbeck said. “I’ve never been without a job.”

Now that he is, he hopes to spend more time reading. He also wants to play more golf, “something I haven’t had time for.”

He and Tammy also plan to travel. When Tammy retired, they went to Cancun, then there was the recent trip to Curacao. They’ve been to the southern and northern states but not those east and west. He’d0 like to see Mt. Rushmore and visit New York City.

Those travel plans will also include an old favorite, especially with the grandchildren. “I think a lot of people don’t know I’m a Disneyworld fan,” he said.

On Friday morning, before he left for work, Tammy asked Hornbeck how he thought he would feel when it was time to leave. “I told her ‘kind of ok.’

“I’m ok with it,” he said.

Obituaries

BREWSTER - Herschel Brewster, 82, of Hoopeston, died at 10:14 p.m. Thursday, June 29, 2017 at home. Visitation will be 10 a.m. until the noon funeral Wednesday at Chestnut Street Church of Christ, Hoopeston. Burial will follow in Floral Hill Cemetery. Memorials are suggested to the family. Anderson Funeral Home, Hoopeston, is handling arrangements.

HODEL - Lauren M. Hodel, 38, of Cissna Park, died Thursday, June 29, 2017, at home. She will be cremated. Knapp Funeral Home is handling arrangements.

Briefly

Independence Day closings

- Hoopeston Public Library will be closed July 4. 3. Summer Reading Club for grades K-6 will be held at the regular time (2 p.m.) Monday.
- Just the Facts will not be printed Tuesday for Independence Day.

Weather

Mostly sunny, then chance of thunderstorms today. High 87. Tonight, mostly cloudy. Low 67. Tomorrow, chance of storms. High 86, low 68.

Fire Calls

Hoopeston Fire Department was called at 3:09 a.m. Friday to Carle Hoopeston Hospital, 701 E. Orange, for a fire alarm. It was determined the alarm was activated by a storm.

Classifieds

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