

REFLECTIONS

By Elmer Koch (Class of 1954)

In 2005 I was urged by George Dahl to become an active member of the Foundation Board of Directors, specifically to chair the Foundation's Scholarship Committee. During these past 15 years I have participated with the other Board members in several milestones in the evolution of the Foundation.

The initial awards granted in 2006 served 11 students. Six separate scholarships with a total value that year of \$36,000 was the beginning of a growing program to support the educational careers of graduating Tigers. More about that later.

From its founding in 1983, the Foundation was organized, managed, and supported by the efforts of volunteers. When I joined the Board, discussions were recognizing the difficulty of maintaining the volunteer model because of the 20-year growth in financial support, numbers of people joining the data base, and the increasing needs for resources at South High. The Board constantly revisited the mission and reaffirmed the validity of providing support to students and staff for the educational needs, both basic and creative, which district funds were unable to cover for the school.

This period in the history of the Foundation is what I would like to review. For me, I worked with four different Board Presidents: Lloyd Shanke, Harold Benson, Nancy Rosenow, and Judy Ayers. In addition to my responsibility as Scholarship Committee Chair, I also served as Vice President to Nancy and Judy during their terms. Discussions regarding need for a paid management position in the Foundation office began during Lloyd's term and became a reality while Harold served. This was the first of five efforts to find the best fit for administrative support.

Each of the various persons who were employed had individual merits and weaknesses. During this time we employed both individuals and a management company to provide office support. The expectations for this role included: day-to-day operations, office management, communications, financial bookkeeping, liaison with the school staff, and such. This part time administrative support enabled us to continue to grow, but pieces were often times a bit ragged.

During the terms of the various office staff, the Foundation Board members held many work sessions to address the formalization of policies and procedures, mission and bylaws, fund raising strategies, recruitment of younger members, and long-range planning. Pieces of all of these activities occurred during the leadership terms of all four Foundation Presidents during my time on the Board. Finally, when our current office manager, Tom Klein, was hired, he was able to pull everything together giving the Board confidence that our "growing pains" were under much better control.

Throughout these years, as I mentioned earlier, the Board never lost sight of its mission. Support for students and teachers through the grant process was the major focus. The Grants Committee had dedicated chairs and members who thoughtfully reviewed requests, interacted with students and staff, and each month allotted thousands of dollars to support basic and creative efforts designed to enhance the educational experiences of South High students. The amount of grants usually totaled from \$70,000 to \$100,000 annually, drawn from membership contributions to the Foundation. In addition, there were also some individual donors and outside organizations who pledged funds for specific purposes. Among those were some unique field trips, support for debate, computer acquisition, an entrepreneurial class,

a stock market class, etc. The grants program has been and remains the backbone of the Foundation's purpose.

Outside funds for broader needs were also sought. For many years, the Foundation pushed the School District to improve the football field. Over and over again such efforts fell short. During Harold's term the Board initiated a drive to build a combination concession stand/ticket booth/storage facility at the entrance to the field. A major fund drive along with a grant from the Vikings helped to make this a reality. The Benson family funded the casting of the tiger statute that was placed by the new building.

The drive to upgrade the field continued through Harold's and Nancy's terms and into Judy's. With much hard work of the Foundation leadership, the District finally was persuaded to put the South High athletic field improvement on its agenda! While some property restrictions limited the most extensive renovations, what finally was done became more than a football field. The track was expanded, additional storage was provided, new bleachers were erected, and lights were installed. A goal to include a press box was finally realized thanks to a generous donor with his financial support. The August 2019 dedication of the renovated athletic field was a milestone event for the Foundation.

As I conclude my role as Chair of the Scholarship Committee, I want to highlight the growth that this program has had over the past 15 years. As mentioned at the beginning of this report, in 2006 we awarded 6 scholarships to 11 students for a value of \$36,000. Our awards in 2020 went to 34 students for 18 different scholarships which were offered with the value of those grants equaling \$117,800. The growth has been phenomenal thanks to individual donors through direct contributions, legacy grants, or endowments.

While these numbers are impressive, I am further pleased to share the cumulative data for these 15 years of scholarship awards to South High seniors. The Committee has granted scholarships to 235 students that have added up to over \$1,000,000 during this period! The Foundation is proud to have managed this effort to further assist in the education of these students; again, with much thanks to the donors who made this happen.

It has been an honor for me to have served the Foundation for these past years as Scholarship Committee Chair and Board Vice President. As I step away from these leadership roles, I will continue to support the Foundation in its efforts as a loyal Tiger!