

PROFILE:

Al Musson

*A Rochester institution*By
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Editor

On Feb. 5, Al Musson will be 75, but his zest for living hasn't faded.

"A rapport with teenagers has kept me young," says Al, an affable man with memorable ties in the Rochester Community School District.

Al was born on a potato farm near Alma but he considers Rochester his hometown. He has lived in the same two-story home on Castell Street since 1936.

A message on a living room wall captures Al's character—"A house is made of bricks and stone but a home is made of love alone."

In good health and high spirits, Al remains active in the community. He is a charter member and past president of Rochester Kiwanis and is treasurer of Rochester Area Youth Guidance. He's also involved with the Rochester Community Schools Credit Union, the Rochester Area Senior Citizens Advisory Council and the First Congregational Church of Rochester.

Al says he made his greatest contribution while teaching. He came to Rochester in 1929 to teach chemistry, physics and math in old Rochester High School, University and Wilcox.

"I found I almost immediately established rapport with young people and I found they kept coming to me for a chance to talk out their problems," Al says. "It was counseling really, but not the way people think of counseling today. I just sat down with kids and let them solve their own problems."

WHEN BUDGET cuts prevented Rochester High from rehiring its band director in the early 1930s, Al tuned up his tuba and trumpet and volunteered. He served as interim director for two years.

Al became principal in 1934. In 1946, he left teaching to become executive secretary of the Oakland County Tuberculosis Association.

"We were able to cut the incidence of TB in half with education, mobile X rays, industrial and hospital x



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rays," Al says. "Then the challenge was gone, so I came back to teaching in 1960. Besides, I wanted to be with the kids."

Al teamed with Reynolds White, a former student of his and now Adams High athletic director, to develop a method of teaching ninth grade science entirely through lab work.

"Textbooks become onerous to students," Al says. "Everything they do is textbook-based and sciences are basically lab oriented. The idea was, if we could teach basic lab skills, we'd produce better science students."

Al, who once flirted with medical school, has a BA in chemistry from Alma College and an MA in education from the University of Michigan. He served on the Rochester Board of Education from 1952 to 1958, the period when rural area school districts consolidated into the Rochester Community School District.

BEFORE MOVING to Rochester, Al taught science and math and was principal in a school in Britton, near Ad-

rian. His wife, Louisa, who died in 1972, was a native of Britton.

"When I was in Britton," Al says, "I lived across the street from her family, but I didn't know her. The first year she was away at school and the second she came to Rochester to teach."

A contract dispute led Al to Rochester.

"At the end of my second year in Britton," Al says, "I was given a contract with no raise. I just turned it back."

"In the meantime, a life insurance man called on me and I said, 'Gosh, I don't even have a job.' He said, 'If I can find you a job, you ought to get some life insurance.' I agreed with him."

"A couple of weeks later, he came back and said there was an opening in Rochester schools. I said, 'Where's Rochester?' He said, 'I don't know but you can find it.'"

"I wrote to W.S. Parker, who was superintendent then, and when I came down to see him, he hired me right on the spot. I met my wife at the first teachers' meeting. That was in the early '30s, when I got only a third of my salary in money; the rest was in scrip (a promissory note)."

SOON AFTER, A.L. Cook, who succeeded Parker, asked Al to be the next high school principal. Al quickly accepted the offer.

"Then I went over to Louisa's classroom (she taught junior high history and math) and said let's get married. I'll be principal next year."

Al is a master storyteller with a colorful background. During World War II, he spent summers as a machine operator, a line inspector and a chemist. He has visited every state but Texas and New Mexico, pre-Castro Cuba, central Europe and England.

Al has two children and four grandchildren, who live in nearby Springhill Subdivision. They are a product of Al's genuine love for young people.