

## **Southwestern Seventh Grade Center and Southwestern Middle School**

By Dan Tompkins

### **Teacher Training Under Mr. Beachum:**

I first came to Southwestern in February of 1972 when it was the Seventh Grade Center. I was a senior college student from Stetson and completing my teacher training while working under the direction of Margaret Early, an experienced English teacher and great role model. I was there to observe Mrs. Early for a week or two and then begin teaching a few classes while she monitored and guided my teaching during the remainder of the school year. By Friday of the first week I had actually taught two classes when during seventh period Mrs. Early was called to the office ... It would be many days before I saw her again as I was left sitting with her last class of the day.

Mr. Beachum, our Principal, called me to his office as the final bell rang, and I never could have imagined what was about to happen. He related that Mrs. Early had already left for South Carolina where a close relative was near death, and she would be gone all of the next week; would I please take over all her classes until she could return? Mr. Beachum was not a principal to be denied, so I began my teaching career by jumping right in. This was a full immersion baptism.

Some of my co-teachers were Mr. Godbold, Mr. Dandridge, Mrs. Jenkins, Mr. Gleason, and Mr. Tussing. Mrs. Cowden ran the school library and Coaches Dominguez and Fisher were in charge of physical education. Mr. Earl McCrary was the Assistant Principal and Mrs. Lane ran the cafeteria. Mr. Gillislee was our custodian and kept the young ten-year-old campus looking great.

### **Mr. Guenther teachers us “Entropy”:**

In 1982 Principal Al Guenther hired me as an English teacher, I believe I took retired teacher Margaret Early's position, and looked forward to returning to Southwestern where I would teach for the next twenty-two years. Mr. Guenther, a former science teacher, instructed us in the scientific principle of entropy; all systems in the universe tend to run down, losing effectiveness and direction unless acted upon by an outside reenergizing force. He was referring to our classroom teaching and how the

teachers were the energizing force that kept the school from running down like an unwound watch. Under Mr. Guenther's leadership Southwestern Seventh Grade Center (later Southwestern Middle School) began to see itself as a "family" which was the first time I had ever heard of students, teachers, and administrators thinking about each other this way. Seeing themselves as the Southwestern Family has been the single most unifying, energizing force for the staff at our school ever since. When all other Volusia County secondary schools were on a six-period school day, Southwestern staff volunteered to teach a seven period day so that a full academic and elective curriculum could be maintained with our shrinking teacher allocations. It was Principal Al Guenther's concepts of entropy and school family that helped build Southwestern into one of Volusia County's "best kept secrets" in those by-gone days.

## **Do you remember??**

- Mr. Gillisslee's car catching fire behind the cafeteria and the school teachers and students buying him a replacement vehicle.
- Night time dances in the cafeteria.
- The principal had a paddle... and could use it.
- Art class means getting to know Mrs. Mary K Smith, Southwestern's most eternal teacher.
- Mr. Pender leading the school band in concerts and performing music in the courtyard.
- Al Guenther sending the students to Coach Dominguez for candy on the last day of the school year.
- The Olympic swimming pool under the gymnasium floor.
- Faculty vs. Student volleyball games (we told the students that Mr. Blanchfield was on the Olympic volleyball team).
- Nancy Tyson being our first Teacher of the Year.
- Snicker Doodles.
- How we all liked Sal Camponella and were secretly glad he never made it to the major leagues.

- Intramural athletics and Field Days with trophies.
- Faculty Christmas parties with a pig roast.
- The first community families with generations of students – Casminskies, Hills, Brutens, Lanes, Jacksons, and many others since then.
- Character education.
- Grade level teams.
- School Improvement Committees and the School Improvement Plans.
- Lake Helen and Orange City students zoned for Southwestern.
- Open storm drains flowing through the school courtyard.
- No air conditioning and Mr. Gillisslee firing the school boiler for heat.
- The first portable classrooms about 1988.
- The outdoor classroom under the oaks.
- Eighth Grade Picnics and Graduation.
- Coach Tussing’s morning sports show on the radio before school started. (How did he get up that early?)
- Southwestern’s own radio station and the TV News Crew.
- Mrs. Lane’s baked chicken every Friday in the cafeteria.
- Steve Stevenson’s Corvettes and Harleys.
- Shirley Wilson’s wild convertibles.
- School lunches with fresh vegetables, trays, silverware and no pizza... ever.
- Mr. Strother saying, “Yes, WHAT???” and students responding “Yes, SIR!!!”  
And liking it.
- Seafood dinner on the last day of post planning.
- Student talent shows.
- Students, administrators, and teachers celebrating Barbara Yarrington’s courage.  
(Thank you, Barbara Raines for showing us how.)
- The Staples – mother and daughter teachers.
- The Gleasons – husband and wife teachers.