

The Good Stuff: Staff Honors Inspirational Teacher Retiring After 39 Years at MSDB

By Leann Goss, Outreach Consultant

Every year, MSDB staff has a Thanksgiving pot luck lunch. The first one I ever attended was about 10 years ago and I was invited to sit at a table where Bob Corwin was also seated. The line had been very long to get lunch so imagine my surprise to see Bob taking his last bite of a delicious homemade dessert before I had even gotten to sit down. As he stood up he announced he was going to get his lunch. Stating the obvious I blurted out, "You just finished dessert!" With that huge smile of his, he replied, "Yep! I always go for the good stuff first; and besides, the dessert line was shorter." As I got to know Bob through the years and had opportunities to observe him with students of all ages, my mind always went back to what he said at that pot luck lunch. Just as Bob found the best food first that day; he first finds the best part of each student he encounters. As teachers, part of the job is to address students' areas of weakness and build them up, fill in gaps. From what I observed, that is not at all how Bob Corwin ever approached his job. He was always more interested in getting to know what made a student "tick" and using whatever that was to motivate and instill confidence and self worth into each and every student. He interacted with his students as a mentor and a role model. He maintained focus on guiding students to become successful, independent, productive citizens. He earned their respect and made it clear he was not looking for their friendship; but instead held high expectations that they would find what they needed to be successful from within themselves. It was always about them; not about him. Bob's approach to teaching continues to inspire me to always try to "go for the good stuff first" when I encounter students and maybe even pot luck lunches.

Certain that I could not be the only one who felt inspired by Bob's dedicated work with students, I decided to seek out a few people who have had the privilege to work closely with him over the years and their responses are as follows:

Jim Kelly, Dean of Students: Bob has devoted more than 35 years of his professional and personal life to the students at the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind. Over the years my relationship with Bob has grown from co-worker to a great friendship – one that I deeply cherish. The hats Bob has worn over the years have been many. The students have benefited from your dedication and loyalty every day. Thank you Bob for your commitment to MSDB and being a great friend – we will miss you and I will miss you even more. Jim

Bill Davis, Former MSDB teacher, counselor, Dean of Students, and Principal: "One of the best assets at the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind(MSDB) has been staff members who dedicated their lives in assisting deaf and blind students achieve their potential. Bob Corwin,

who recently retired from MSDB, was always a good role model for students in approaching and dealing with problems. He knew the students well and could capitalize on their abilities effectively influencing, teaching, counseling, and securing employment for them. Over the forty (40) years at MSDB, Bob held a variety of jobs which included: live-in houseparent, coach, athletic-recreation director (AD), classroom teacher, and transition coordinator. Bob Corwin always demonstrated humor, a caring attitude, and a commitment to the students he served.

Often when a graduating student was asked what they would miss most about MSDB, the reply would be: "I will miss Bob Corwin. He would help me work through my problems and was always there to help me."

It was not uncommon to find out that Bob Corwin was well known in Great Falls, and he served as an effective liaison for MSDB. Bob, I wish you a well-earned and happy retirement.

Pam Stuckey, retired Communication Technician: " In 1997 through 1998, my husband, Rick, and I were sponsors of the senior class, after Joyce Moore left MSDB employment to have a baby, I think. Bob always knew how the senior classes' dues and money worked in regards to the gym concession stand fundraiser, the proms, senior gifts to the school, etc. For a number of years, Bob had done the intricate job of advising the class sponsors – he was the go-to person, for example, when a student was not able to come up with at least a small portion of the dues needed for going on a senior trip. Bob would liaison with the cottage and other groups in order for the student to have an extra chore to earn dues. He knew a myriad of facts needed to keep things running smoothly, such as how to work the popcorn and pop machines, and how to buy just the right amount of chip and hot dogs, depending on the size of the events and games of other small schools that used our gym. "

Mary Lou Weist, retired teacher's assistant: "The glass is always half full. This was and still is Bob's way of thinking. I worked with Bob most of my 28 years at MSDB and I soon learned this is how he felt about his students: they DO have the ability to be the best they can be. He taught me how kind words of encouragement, a smile, patience and "listening" to the students whether signing or speaking meant the world to them. Students knew they could depend on Bob, they knew they were worth something. I learned no matter what the age of the student they have the potential to do their best if given the chance. I know we all have a work ethic, I know Bob helped me improve mine. I feel I am a better person for having had the privilege to work and learn from him. Thanks, Bob :) "

Yvette Smail, Behavior Specialist: “Bob is a fantastic ‘barytone/base’ singer and I always enjoyed the rare moments he would sing a few lyrics! When Bob gets irritated his eyebrows became *The brow*. Bob was one of the most welcoming people when I started working at MSDB and I feel blessed to now call him friend.”

Gail Bechard, retired teacher: “Bob was a great role model for the preschool class. They loved him!” Pictured: Bob comforts preschooler, Gracie Bechard, in the preschool room in 2006. We were studying Mr. C and his Cotton Candy (Letter People). So Bob (Mr. C) would come into Preschool every year when we were learning about Mr C. Again, he was so great & always willing to help. I am guessing this was in about 1985.

Steve Sangwin, former teacher: “I always enjoyed Bob being calm, especially when things did not always go as planned. We had some challenging students and he and I had to do some tag teaming! I always counted on him to be a good listener. As time went on there weren’t too many male teachers around so he and I kind of felt an allegiance and would stop and visit when we could.”

Denise Rutledge, teacher: I met Bob Corwin ten years ago when I started at MSDB as a secretary. Bob has been there for me through all steps of my MSDB career and has encouraged my continued growth as an educator and professional. “Our” days typically began at MSDB at 6:00 AM. For years, Bob and I (along with a few other dedicated colleagues) used the gym facilities each day before our official duty time started. In those early morning workout sessions, we solved the world’s problems, provided one another a listening ear and developed a strong friendship that will last a lifetime. I am going to miss the stories and his expert advice. The gym is going to echo with the sounds of the equipment and the grunts of exertion, but there will be a hollow silence from the loss of conversation and laughter.

Bob’s career has impacted thousands of students and staff members over his 39 year career. Mr. Corwin coached students and taught physical education classes for many years—teaching his students the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, exercise and the importance of pushing oneself to do their best, as well as teaching them the importance of working together as a team. He worked as an employability coordinator and gave many students their first taste of meaningful employment—instructing them on how to be contributing members of society while also learning new skills and trades. While coordinating the employment, he worked tirelessly within the Great Falls community to promote our school and our students, collaborating with local business owners so that they also learned about our students and their abilities. Mr. Corwin has been the one to facilitate the various class sponsorships for numerous years. He has dedicated countless hours to seeing our students through their high school years

and to their commencement. Mr. Corwin also worked as the activities director and facilities manager for MSDB for the last forever. As a class sponsor, I was privileged to work with him for perhaps hundreds of hours over the years in the concession booth during various activities that he helped coordinate in the Mustang Center. Event participants, families, directors and coaches know him on a first name basis, relish his enthusiasm for their event's success and consider him a partner and friend. His abilities to facilitate these activities have helped to promote collaboration between our school and many more in the area. As a teacher, Mr. Corwin guide students in acquiring the knowledge to conquer the world. Students in his classes have benefited from his experience, insight and direction. As an academic peer, the staff members of MSDB have been blessed for the last four decades in having a loyal, patient, caring, intelligent, generous friend who has always been there for us.

Bob, you have touched so many facets of our school that it will be difficult to imagine MSDB without you. I know that I join hundreds of other students, families and staff that wish you the very best for a well-deserved retirement. Enjoy your family, your hunting, your fishing, your travels, your home and whatever else life brings you. I have been honored to call you my friend for many years and look forward to many more.

Emily LaSalle, Outreach Consultant: Bob Corwin is a noble man with qualities that inspire. He holds our students to high expectations; no short cuts or excuses. I admire Bob for the many years of dedicated service to our school. Bob you have touched many lives both young and old. I will miss your smile and your ability to make gray skies turn blue.

Gary McManus, retired teacher: Bob Corwin is the kindest, most caring, and generous man I have ever known. He cared deeply about the students and the staff. He worked hard and put many hours into setting up the Jr. High School tournaments at our school. Many of the coaches and athletic directors from the many other schools really appreciated Bob for all he did to make the tournaments run smoothly. Bob was there to open up the gym, there all day to see that everything went smoothly, and he would then close up; putting in 16-18 hours a day on the weekends to run the basketball tournaments. He then cleaned up on Sundays because he knew that no janitors came in until Monday afternoon. If he hadn't cleaned up, the gym would not ave been clean for my classes in the morning!!! He received no money, no appreciation for his extra work. He is very humble and would not want to gain attention for anything that he did for the school. He always helped get sponsors for the freshman class so that they could start raising money for their senior trip; Bob is just the nicest guy around!!.