

Wes A. Townsend

SCVUHS - First Principal

Inducted into the Inaugural SC Hall of Fame October 30, 2009

Wes Townsend was born in Rochelle, Texas to Ollie and Carrie Townsend on August 23, 1904. He was the oldest of ten children. He went to grammar school at a little country school called Old Emma and graduated from high school in Crosbyton, Texas. He went to college at Sul Ross for four years, but he only stayed during football and basketball season, so he did not graduate. He thought he would do the same thing at Flagstaff Normal School (NAU). The first game he played was at El Paso and it just happened that Pop McHale was scouting the game and turned him in. He coached the J.V. basketball team until he graduated. He met Helen Wells on a blind date and they were married on August 18, 1929 in Mayer, Arizona.

His first teaching job was at Duncan, Arizona. He started teaching in September and the "depression" started on October 29, 1929. Helen taught kindergarten and Wes was the jack-of-all-trades, he was the principal, teacher, coach, bus driver and occasionally the janitor. Between the two of them, they made \$120.00 a month. They had one of only two cars that ran in town, so it was borrowed a lot. When they played an out of town game, he would take \$5.00 of his own money and he and the team would have a contest after the game to see who could eat the most hamburgers, which only cost a nickel apiece. He would give the local grocer \$10.00 at the beginning of each month to dole out groceries to who ever needed it the worst. A daughter, Johnny, was born on April 10, 1935 in Duncan. He took the job as superintendent of the State Reform School at Fort Grant in 1938. He was there until 1943. Sandra was born in August 1944. He then moved to Safford and ran the Greyhound bus depot until 1945. He ran a Dodge/Plymouth agency until 1948. He was a state senator in Graham County (1945-1948) until we moved to Eloy in 1948 to be the first principal at SCVUHS. He helped many kids during his years in Eloy. He gave them jobs and often money out of his own pocket. He had a lot of influence and he used it to help everyone in the community. When the SCVUHS was being built, he had a swimming pool included in the construction. This was not necessarily built for school use only, but for the entire community to use. The swimming pool became the center of attraction for the community all summer long. It was open to the public and civic organizations. The campus buildings were also made available to the community for meetings and social gatherings. Wes initiated an annual Community Bar-B-Q gathering by pit bar-b-cueing beef donated by a local rancher, Mr. Gobeau.

The beginning of the school year in 1951, Wes ended segregation at SCVUHS, based on the Arizona State Legislature ruling eliminating the segregation requirement for African - Americans. (See 1951 Ariz. Session. Laws Ch. 74, §1, HB 86). This was three years prior to Arizona and the nation adopting the 1954 Supreme Court decision Brown vs. Topeka School system, a law ending segregation in public schools. Some opposition in Eloy and the school district was voiced, but Wes convinced them that integration would be to the benefit of the students and the community. His ability to balance family life and careers in business, education, management and as a state senator, earned him the respect of multitudes of people from all walks of life. The SCVUHS Townsend field is named after him.

Wes left Eloy in 1955 and went to Glendale as superintendent of the Glendale High School system. In 1962, he went to work for the Department of Public Instruction as assistant director and left in 1965 to be principal at Monument Valley High School. He returned to the Phoenix area in 1966, became the superintendent at Buckeye Elementary School, and was there until he retired in 1974. All the Arizona university presidents and some Jr. Colleges had representatives attend his retirement celebration in Buckeye, Arizona in 1974. In 1975, he returned for his 50th reunion at Sul Ross University in Texas and his college coach announced that Wes Townsend was the best athlete he had ever coached.

Helen died in August of 1976 and Wes died in September of 1977.