

Robert Johnson

Distinguished Alumni Award

Robert Johnson was born in 1946 in Hickory, Mississippi and spent most of his childhood in Freeport, Illinois. He graduated from Freeport High School in 1964. As the ninth of ten children, Johnson knew his parents struggled to provide for a large family, and honed his ability to capitalize on opportunities. Johnson's parents worked in Freeport factories and his humble upbringing likely shaped his professional career and his ability to know and understand all of the different needs of people and deliver to them entertainment and services suited to their interests.

Robert L. Johnson is the Founder and Chairman of The RLJ Companies, an innovative business network that owns or holds interests in businesses operating in hotel real estate, private equity, consumer financial services, asset management, automobile dealerships, sports and entertainment, and video lottery terminal (VLT) gaming.

Prior to forming The RLJ Companies, Mr. Johnson was founder and chairman of Black Entertainment Television (BET), the nation's first and leading television network providing quality entertainment, music, news, sports and public affairs programming for the African American audience.

Johnson continues to attract and manage capital and create value for investors as he recently announced the successful creation of RLJ Entertainment, Inc., one of the largest independent global distributors of digital and video content. RLJ Entertainment, Inc. marks the third time Johnson has successfully taken a company public. In 1991, Johnson took BET public making the network the first African American company to be traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

RLJ Lodging Trust, a \$2 billion market cap hotel real estate investment trust (REIT), went public in 2011. In 2001, Johnson sold BET to Viacom for approximately \$3 billion, and remained the Chief Executive Officer through 2006. The Viacom deal is widely regarded as the deal that established Johnson as the first African American billionaire in the United States. In July 2007, Johnson was named by USA Today as one of "The 25 Most Influential Business Leaders of the Past 25 Years."

In 2014, three of Johnson's holding companies were featured on the Black Enterprise 100s list: RML Automotive, LLC ranked 1st in a category of 60 in the auto dealership rankings; RLJ Equity Partners, LLC and RLJ Credit Management, LLC ranked 12th and 14th respectively on the private equity firms list.

Currently, Mr. Johnson serves on the following boards: RLJ Lodging Trust; RLJ Entertainment, Inc.; KB Home; Lowe's Companies, Inc.; Retirement Clearinghouse; Strayer Education; Elevate Credit, Inc.; The Business Council; and Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Mr. Johnson holds a Master's degree in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Studies from the University of Illinois.

When Mr. Johnson visits Freeport, he remains true to his Northwestern Illinois roots and enjoys hunting with old friends or family. Students and alumni of Freeport High School should note that Mr. Johnson's continued success comes because of hard work and commitment. From his humble beginnings, Bob Johnson has established himself as one of the most successful entrepreneurs in history by always being willing to dedicate his time and talent to new possibilities.

Kathy Helm

Friend of Freeport High School Award

Kathy Helm has long supported education, advocated for children, and provided educational opportunities for students in Freeport District #145. However, for the majority of her volunteer time she has supported from behind “stage”, only stepping out publicly when the District needed firm guidance from a petite woman with a soft voice.

Kathy planned to teach after attending Iowa State in 1966 where she earned her degree in English with minors in education and speech. She took her first teaching job as an 8th grade English teacher for two years in Madison, WI. Bruce, also an Iowa State graduate, was in Madison for an MBA. They were married in 1968 and he uprooted the young couple to his new engineering job in Pennsylvania. After a year out East, she and Bruce chose to volunteer for a year as VISTA volunteers in the agricultural valley of Visalia, California. They helped migrant workers and their families build their own homes, furnish them, and improve their English.

Kathy and Bruce came to Freeport in the October of 1970 when Bruce decided to join the family business which was known at the time as Freeport Blacktop Company. Kathy accepted a job teaching 7th grade English at Carl Sandburg School for 2 years and then chose to stay home to raise their young family. Interestingly enough, Mike Chance (Bill and Eleanor’s son) and Brian Helm (Kathy and Bruce’s older son) attended pre-school together and continued through Freeport Schools, both graduating in 1990. Bruce and Kathy’s three children graduated from Freeport Schools and have together given the Helm family 8 grandchildren to enjoy.

Kathy’s first step in volunteer service came after a 1st grade field trip with her daughter’s class to the Rockford’s Children’s Discovery Center, then housed in the old Rockford Post Office. After the field trip, Kathy helped form a group of other mothers and a few dads to talk about what “they could do” to improve learning in our schools.

The group talked to school superintendent Ted Wetekamp who knew of parents in other school communities working to raise funds and gave the group his full support to establish an organization for the benefit of the schools. Bruce’s cousin from Los Altos, CA shared information about a school foundation in her community. Freeport’s group of concerned parents was instrumental in the formation of the Freeport School Fund and Kathy led the group as its president until 1987 when Elaine Plager became president. That year Kathy was elected to the school board and served for 8 years. She has continued as a Freeport Community Public School Fund board member for the past 27 years. Her calm demeanor barely masks an intense desire to do right by kids and provide for the future of Freeport.

As for her link to education, Kathy Helm believes the desire to teach and work with children is “in your blood.” She fondly remembers two aunts who were dedicated and enthusiastic teachers. She knows that educators serve as role model, coach, confidant and teacher simultaneously.

Helm continues to advocate for Freeport Schools, knowing the schools are vitally important to the community’s future. She has been fortunate to experience the wonderful activities of two of her grandsons at Empire School, a preschool granddaughter, three elementary and middle school children in Rockford, and two third graders in Davenport, Iowa schools. She acknowledges that “schools form kids’ lives” and good schools mean everything. Kathy continues to shape the future of Freeport Schools from the sideline, stepping out to speak and lead when Freeport Schools need her the most.

Bill Chance

Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

When Bill Chance retired after 32 years as a teacher, coach and athletic director at Freeport High School he didn't really retire. In fact Bill continued to "report" to work for another decade as a volunteer, helping out or just generally continuing to be part of the fabric of Freeport High School. In fact, the Pretzel Gold Rush was started by Bill Chance

Chance was born in 1930, the son of a teacher who would later serve as school superintendent of Marion County. He attended the University of Illinois in the fall of 1948 and played football for three years until he was called to serve our country as a Marine during the Korean War for two years.

When he returned to the U of I in 1955, Chance did not return to playing football, but instead helped coach. Later, Chance earned his Master's degree in Education Administration from Southern Illinois University in 1960. His first teaching job took him for two years to Saunemin Community High School before Freeport High School got hold of Chance and held on tight to one of its favorite educators.

In the fall of 1958, Chance came to Freeport and became a Pretzel. He initially taught social studies and then later taught physical education while also studying athletic training principles enough to tape many a student athlete up for competition. Chance closed out the final five years of his career as the athletic director of Freeport High School. He married Eleanor Iske, a fellow teacher, in 1965. They had a son, Mike, who married and gave the Chance's two grandchildren to enjoy.

Chance knew he wanted to make a difference in kids' lives and often spent long hours away from home and with Freeport teenagers. In a Journal-Standard article published near the time of Chance's retirement, Chance said, "I always wanted kids to become good citizens and do the best they can do. I always wanted kids to work hard in the classroom and play hard on the field."

Chance wanted his students to see the opportunities in front of them and take advantage of every possible moment. He frequently drove students to college to look at the opportunities, even giving students suitcases when they needed to use them to pack up and start the next chapter of their lives. According to Bill's widow, Eleanor, one such suitcase went to Rufus Pearson (Preston Pearson's brother) to take with him to college.

Students of Bill Chance made the decision to become educators because of the positive influence Chance had on their lives. Countless students have gone on to become coaches and teachers in order to give back to the youth of our future in the same way Chance touched their lives. Chance believed in the power of serving students but didn't just serve students.

Bill Chance also knew how to treat a community. Despite the social and cultural changes of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, students of Chance can recount story after story of Mr. Chance treating all students the same. The impact of a kind word and gesture cannot be underestimated in value as students who learned how to treat others by watching Bill Chance have gone on to treat others with respect their whole lives and produced a ripple effect of fairness and equity.

As students left FHS, frequently they would have conversations with Chance about their next steps and how to overcome obstacles. Chance would help the student see what they needed to do, and then would always tell students he would be there to support them and would pledge to remain a part of their life as a lifeline of support should they ever need it. As a result, students frequently came back to FHS to seek out Chance and catch him up on their successes and obstacles they faced.

It should come as no surprise that Chance just had to report to work after he retired. He had to see the kids and he had to fulfill his promise to be there to support students and offer advice when they came back to visit FHS. When Chance passed, students of his commented that he understood "confused kids" and didn't see color, status or ability. He just saw kids for kids and supported and challenged them in whatever way he could.

Chance is most remembered for his quick smile and the manner in which he asked his students to look him in the eye, and then challenged them to give more. There were no excuses--students knew to take responsibility for their actions

and performance. On the playing field, if Coach Chance's team lost, they would be told to assess what they could do better, not who to blame.

He served on many organizations and boards including Lions, Amvets, American Legion, and St. John's UCC. He received the Pat Holmes award in 1998 and served the NIC-9 as secretary/treasurer for 12 years. He also served as president of the FHS Fans Club for many years. His home high school in Salem, IL also inducted him into their Hall of Fame as a football and basketball athlete.

Bill Chance even used his own money to buy the school its first set of weights and then ended up getting reimbursed later when the athletic director saw how much the student athletes used the weights. And, the recently resurrected Fans Club Gold Rush was started by our own Bill Chance who ran the fundraiser for years and years. Over and over Chance gave of his time and talent to make Freeport High School the best it could be.

To Bill, kids always came first. Adults were just never as important because he was hired to work with kids not adults. Bill Chance passed in the summer of 2011 after decades of influencing the youth of Freeport High School. He used to say "It only takes a little more to go first class." Bill Chance was first class.

Preston Pearson

Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individuals/Accomplished Team Award

Preston Pearson has been a resident of Dallas for more than the last 30 years and continues to be involved with the current Cowboys organization as a distinguished NFL football legend. He has two sons, Greg and Matt, and four grandchildren.

Professionally, Pearson is the first and only NFL player to play in five Super Bowls with three different teams. Historically, only eight other NFL players have appeared in as many Super Bowls. He played with the Colts in Super Bowl III, the Steelers in Super Bowl IX, and capped off his career with a run of Super Bowls with the Cowboys in X, XII and XIII. His 1975 season with the Cowboys is regarded as his best season (rushed for 509 yards, caught 27 passes for 351 yards, and gained another 391 yards on kickoff returns). Pearson was often a member of special teams and is regarded as one of the best running backs in NFL history. In his 14 NFL seasons, Pearson rushed for 3,609 yards, caught 254 passes for 3,095 yards, returned seven punts for 40 yards, and gained 2,801 yards on kickoff returns. Overall, Pearson gained 9,545 total yards and scored 33 touchdowns (17 rushing, 13 receiving, two kickoff returns and one fumble recovery).

Pearson capitalized on the connections he made as a professional athlete and in 1980 founded Pro-Style Associates, a sports marketing and promotions company that acts as a broker to help corporation, individual or group special events secure athletes for marketing, advertising or promotional purposes. He continues to run that company today and has found ways to diversify his business as marketing changes have required, intentionally keeping his company small and nimble by playing an active role in all aspects of operations.

Pearson's business endeavors have also included owning/managing partner of eleven Kentucky Fried Chicken units from 1979-1986, owner of three Wendy's from 1982-1987, developed Smiles caricature program for 7-11 Slurpee cups, and invented a product called the Kord Keeper. In addition, he was frequently featured on radio programming as a writer and host and on television as a color analyst and host of athletic and sports related programming.

He believes strongly that student athletes are too narrowly focused on a single sport today and miss opportunities to just be athletes. His own experience speaks to his pure athletic abilities. Pearson left Freeport High School as an All-State center by negating taller players using this athleticism and aggressiveness. Pearson was drafted into the NFL having no college football experience, but having played college basketball for the University of Illinois and lettering three seasons while maintaining a 3.5 GPA. Pearson notes, I took advantage of my god given athletic talent which was augmented by the versatility experienced in different sports growing up and played in in high school."

When Pearson left U of I, he left with 12 credits remaining. Three years after he was drafted into the NFL, Pearson returned to U of I to finish his degree...a promise he had made to his mother years earlier when he boarded the train in Freeport just yards from his boyhood home. Pearson remembered his mother standing on the steps, waving to the train, hopeful for her son's future success and made sure to finish his degree for his mother.

Preston remembers growing up in the 50s and 60s as a black male in Freeport. He remembers caddying for white golfers, unable to enter the clubhouse himself. He remembers getting stopped by the police on the west side of town near where his little league games were played in Reed Park. He remembers shoveling snow and finding other odd jobs to buy sports equipment, a bike and a desk to use to study. And he remembers fondly pick-up baseball, basketball track and field and football games on his street as well as his Little League team, sponsored by Structo (where his mother worked one of her jobs) and coached by former mayor Mark McElroy.

Pearson retains roots in Freeport with siblings Mary and Rufus Jr., who still live in the family home, and Alice who lives two blocks away. Edward resides in Rockford, and Pearl near Detroit. Preston Pearson remembers his parents working hard to provide for their family and rarely being able to attend games that he and Rufus (widely known as a more gifted athlete than Preston in High School) played.

What Freeport likely doesn't know about Preston Pearson is that he has given extensively of his time and talent in the Dallas community that he calls home. He produced an award winning Children's program, served on the YMCA Board, Sickie Cell Anemia Foundation, Blake Cornish Transplant Foundation, Minority Business Development

Council, provided financial advice on a radio show and served on the Bill J. Priest Institute for Economic Development as a distinguished alumni. He continues to be active with the NFL Alumni in Dallas and the NFL Retired Players Association while also serving as a spokesperson for Paws In the City (adoption and spay/neutering). He has co-chaired a dance routine fundraiser to benefit several animal organizations and continues to serve as a Taste of the NFL fundraiser co-chair as well as continuing to serve on the Tom Landry Award Selection Committee.

In the fall of 2013, Pearson addressed the Freeport Football Team during practice and reminded them that “greatness starts within” while the team gathered around him on the same practice field he practiced on 50 years prior. He also reminded the football team to “put everything into being a good team now” – CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE MOMENT - (from the movie Dead Poets Society starring the late Robin Williams), “nothing is promised to anyone, and you don’t want to think back later and wish you had done more.”

Preston wants Freeport Pretzel athletes to “Be what you can be in all sports. There is too much specialization today. Get outside, don’t worry about other problems, and play everything.”

Pearson remembers Freeport fondly as “home” and says it “always will be.” He recognizes that lack of opportunities have left many black Freeport men “trapped” but he believes the very creation of a Hall of Fame honoring two of the most successful alumni from Freeport will help Freeport to “make changes and move forward, onward and upward.” He is proud to continue to be called “that Pretzel” and tells everyone he is from Freeport.

Preston is linked forever to Coach Chance, an educator who treated Preston’s family and all students the same regardless of race or socio-economics. Bill Chance is highly regarded by Preston as his coach in multiple sports for all of high school and was the one person at the High School that Preston made sure to visit when he was in town up until Bill’s passing. Preston said of Coach Chance: “He seemed to know everything and everyone seemed to know and like him. Even when he retired he was still at the high school every day. He was a Pretzel.”

To learn more about Pearson’s determination to succeed and his life in the NFL, check out his book “Hearing the Noise,” published in 1984 by William Morrow and Co.

Dan Balz—1964 Graduate of Freeport High School

Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award

- Dan Balz is Chief Correspondent at The Washington Post. He joined the paper in 1978 and has been involved in the news organization's political coverage as a reporter or editor throughout his career.
- He is author or co-author of three books and one e-book, including two New York Times bestsellers: Collision 2012: Obama vs. Romney and the Future of Elections in America and, with co-author Haynes Johnson, The Battle for America 2008: The Story of an Extraordinary Election.
- In April 2011 the White House Correspondents' Association honored Balz with the prestigious Merriman Smith Award for excellence in presidential coverage under deadline pressure.
- Balz has won a number of awards during his career, most recently the Robin Toner Prize for Excellence in Political Reporting. He is a regular panelist on PBS's "Washington Week" and has been a frequent guest on CBS's "Face the Nation," PBS's "News Hour," NBC's "Meet the Press," and CNN's "State of the Union" and "Inside Politics."
- He received a bachelor's and a master's degree from the University of Illinois and served in the U.S. Army. Before joining the Post, he worked at National Journal magazine and the Philadelphia Inquirer. He is married to Nancy Johnson Balz and they are the parents of an adult son.
- Dan Balz represents Freeport on a national stage regularly, and comes home often to continue to give back and share his experiences with his hometown.
- We are very, very proud to call Dan Balz a Pretzel.

John Fox - 1983 Graduate of Freeport High School

Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award

- Captain John H. Fox is a 1983 graduate of Freeport High School and a 26 year active duty Navy veteran. Upon graduation from Western Illinois University in 1989, Captain Fox enlisted in the United States Navy as an Aviation Ordinance Aircrewman and was assigned to Patrol Squadron FORTY (VP-40) located at Naval Air Station Moffett Field, California. While assigned to VP-40 he deployed to Pacific and Southern commands.
- In 1989 he was selected for Aviation Officer Candidate School and was commissioned as a Naval Officer in Nov 1993. In May 1996 Captain Fox completed flight training and was designated as a Naval Flight Officer. Upon completion of advanced flight training he was assigned to Naval Air Station Brunswick Maine as a P-3 ORION Tactical Coordinator, Instructor and Mission Commander.
- Throughout his naval career Captain Fox has completed nine deployments around the globe conducting numerous maritime reconnaissance and patrol missions in support of Global War on Terrorism, OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Non-combat Evacuation Operations, Counter Narcotics Operations and Mainland Home Defense missions. He has served in numerous squadrons and on major staffs to include assignments to VP-11, VP-10, VP-45, Reconnaissance and Patrol Wing FIVE, Navy Personnel Command, USS Theodore Roosevelt, Joint Forces Command and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation.
- In May 2010 he reported as the Executive Officer and Commanding Officer of Patrol Squadron FIVE (VP-5) located at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida. (VP stands for fixed wing patrol aircraft.) Captain Fox was competitively selected by a selection board consisting of Naval Aviation Commodores and Carrier Air Wing Commanders who select the next round of squadron commanding officers.
- While there he led a team of sailors and officers encompassing 350 personnel, eight P-3C maritime aircraft and 12 combat aircrews.
- CAPT Fox claims he definitely "married up". His wife is the former Jill Elaine Woods of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They reside in Norfolk, Virginia with their two daughters Kayla and Hannah.
- Captain Fox rose through the ranks to recently be promoted to Captain. Awards include: Meritorious Defense Service Medal, Navy Commendation Medal (4 awards) and Navy Achievement Medal (4 awards)

John B. Whiton - 1964 Graduate of Freeport High School

Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award

- Born in Savannah, IL; grew up in Freeport
- Attended Harlem School through grade 4, Empire grades 5 and 6, Junior High grades 7 8,9 and FHS grades 10, 11, 12 where he participated in drama under Jeannette Lloyd's mentoring
- Served as a US Army Counterintelligence from 1968-71 conducting background checks for high-level security clearances for enlisted and officers holding sensitive positions in a 26 county area of Southern Illinois
- Attended University of Chicago Law School, and returned to Freeport to practice law with his father in 1974 (who promptly retired!)
- Senior partner with the firm Fishburn, Whiton and Thruman
- Member of the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors in the mid-1970s, member of the Board of Director of Neighborhood Housing Services (now Homestart), 2004-05
- Member of the YMCA of Northwest Illinois Board of Trustees (helps to manage a \$1.5 million endowment fund) and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Hildreth Beneficial Trust (a private endowment benefiting local charities)
- 25 year volunteer with United Way; served as Chair & President
- FSD 145 School Board Member from 1991-1999; President 2 years, 40 years as a Kiwanis Member and 35 years as the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission as Panel Chair
- Married Janet Moss in 1969 (a FHS 1964 grad). Both of their children attended Freeport schools. Brian Whiton and his wife live in Brooklyn, New York and Carrie Whiton Helm and her husband have three grandchildren who attend Empire School.

1915 Boys' Basketball State Champions Team and Coach Dan Dougherty

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/Interscholastic Individuals/Accomplished Team Award

- The 1914-15 season is highly regarded as one of the most brilliant basketball seasons in Pretzel history.
- A fast, but not tall team, with both exceptional ability and exceptional intelligence dominated the State of Illinois in 1915.
- The 1915 state basketball tournament was held at Millikin University. The Decatur Herald wrote, "Freeport displayed more basketball in a few minutes than all the other teams combined."
- The Pretzels won their first game against Granite City 41-19, and defeated Carbondale 38-14 in the semifinals, playing to a crowd of 300 hometown fans. (Think for a minute about the transportation options that were available in 1915...300 Freeport fans went to Decatur!)
- 4 out of 5 of the starters were named to the all-tournament team. The 5th starter, Glenn "Pat" Holmes later helped the Pretzels claim their second state title in 1926 as the Varsity Basketball Coach.
- A bit of history: Cook County had its own championship tournament. Cook County winner Lane Tech bragged it was so good it didn't have to play Freeport for the championship. In response, the Pretzels invited Lane Tech to play an exhibition game at the Odd Fellows Temple at Main and Walnut Streets in Freeport. The Pretzels won 70-6.
- Coach Dougherty is regarded as one of the Pretzels' great coaches because he taught his smaller, but quick players to believe in the impossible and persevere despite the obvious size disadvantage that a lack of height posed for them.
- We are honored tonight to induct the 1915 team and Coach Dougherty into the FHS Hall of Fame.

Mark Hollis—2003 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- Mark's love of pole vaulting started at a young age.
- His brother, Steve, was his first mentor and coach and estimates that Mark received his first pole before he entered kindergarten.
- Steve wanted to be here tonight to celebrate the pole vaulting connection he shares with his brother, separated by 15 years...and at the last minute was able to find a pilot friend to bring him here from Indiana just for tonight's ceremony.
- 9th place finish at Illinois State Track meet
- 2003 FHS school record holder at 14'6"...his record would still stand, Spencer Hollis (not a relative, but same last name) who ousted his record in 2006 with a 15'3"...in fact Mark told our athletic director today he'd like to come back and set the facility record in our spruced up stadium.
- 3 time USA national champion '10,'11, '14
- member of World championship team in Korea '11
- 5th place at 2012 Olympic Trials
- bronze medal winner at Continental cup in Marrakech, Morocco '14
- Bronze medal winner at 2015 Pan Am Games in Toronto, 19'2"
- 2nd highest jump in the world in the 2014 season; #1 ranked pole vaulter in the USA
- Mark is at the "HEIGHT" of his pole vaulting career
- He is currently training for the Olympics in Rio.

Wes Luedeking—1953 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- Freeport High School and Northern Illinois University exceptional athlete
- FHS Sophomore standout athlete (high scorer on sophomore football team and 6th in the Big Eight Sophomore Conference)"
- As a junior, he was the leading ball carrier and passer earning Big 8 All-Conference Honors
- Only FHS athlete to win two Pentathlons (2nd one in 1952, when he was a junior in HS and one his senior year too)
- He won 13 Varsity letters in four sports at Freeport High School.
- NIU four sport athlete; led the Huskies on the football field his rookie year in seven categories
- Luedeking produced one of the most prolific rookie seasons in the Huskie annals with 1,132 all-purpose yards and led the Huskies in seven individual statistical categories (1953) -- (1) rushing (330 yards on 97 carries), (2) scoring (42 points on seven touchdowns), (3) receiving (24 catches for 247 yards and two TDs), (4) total offense (330 yards), (5) punt returns (nine for 261 yards and a 29.0 ypr. average), (6) interceptions (six for 53 yards and an 8.8 ypr. average), and (7) all-purpose yardage. His 24 receptions ranked fifth nationally in the College Division (1953).
- For his efforts, he was named second team All-IIAC and honorable mention Williamson Service Little All-America, plus won the IIAC Academic Medal.
- Wes Luedeking touched the lives of students as a coach after he quit playing himself. He taught and coached nearly every sport at FHS for 30 years ('66-'96)

Emily Pisula—2000 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- Emily's accomplishments speak for themselves. As a young swimmer, Emily was setting National Records by the time she was 10 years old. When she was swimming she pushed herself, her teammates and her coaches to keep up with her. Her passion for swimming and being competitive remains part of her coaching career today.
- During her FHS career, she broke every individual woman's swimming record in Freeport
- Holds the longest standing Illinois State record for Girls Swimming in the 200 yard individual medley.
- 1998-99 Rockford Register Star Female Athlete of the Year
- 3 x State of Illinois Champion
- 14 x Illinois State Qualifier
- 15 x High School All-American
- 14 x 1st Team All State
- She continued her success into college and received a four year full ride swimming scholarship from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She set just a few UW school records,
- 3 x NCAA Division 1 All-American
- 2 x First Team All-Big Ten
- 2 x UW record holder
- 3 x Big Ten Champion
- 4 x NCAA Division 1 National Qualifier
- Placed highly at all of her Big 10 Championship meets, attended four NCAA Championships and qualified for two Olympic trials. Her academic skill is evidenced by the fact that she graduated in four years despite insane training hours and travel commitments.
- Her swimming passion is being passed on to the swimmers she now coaches in Monroe, WI. She has multiple state champions and has worked with many National Qualifiers. Of course she keeps her family involved as her 8 year old daughter is already breaking team records and showing great skill and motivation. In her grandfather Mike Pisula's words, "she is just like Emily".
- Emily Pisula was named the 2015 Wisconsin swimming age-group coach of the year and tonight we are thrilled to induct her into the FHS Hall of Fame.

Roosevelt Banks - 1944 Graduate of Freeport High School

Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

Roosevelt actually fits several induction categories, but we choose to honor him with induction tonight in the category of educator/coach because of the lives of Pretzels he has impacted positively over the years.

- In high school at FHS, Banks was Standout academically and inducted into FHS's National Honor Society.
- Honors Day as a Senior: Recipient of the Student/Athletic Award
- Lettered all four years in Basketball, Football and Track
- Elected 1st African-American captain of any sports team at FHS as Track Captain his senior year
- Roosevelt served in the Army during WWII, attaining the rank of Staff Sergeant in a Quartermaster Unit attached to the tenth army. He served overseas in the Western Pacific Theater Operations
- After two years in the Army, Banks entered and graduated from Illinois State University in four years (1950).
- Banks was inducted into the Illinois State University Hall of Fame in 1972
- September 1958: Hired as first African-American teacher in FSD 145
- Banks served 14 years as a 6th grade teacher at Taylor Park School and 18 years as a dean/counselor at Freeport High School
- FSD145 Banks-Bergagna Education Building proudly bears Roosevelt's name

Mike Pisula

Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

- The impact Mike Pisula has as a coach on those around him is profound. His influence doesn't stop with his athletes, but affects all of his coaches, parents of athletes, co-workers, and even administrators.
- No one was harder on him than Mike himself when success evaded his athletes. He pushed himself as a coach to help his athletes succeed, always reflecting on missed opportunities and looking for the positive even in defeat.
- Nine girls conference championships, two boys conference championships in swimming
- 9 girls sectional titles, 3 boys sectional titles
- 4 top 12 finishes with the girls (9th, 7th, 4th, and 10th)
- 2 top 12 finishes with the boys (8th and 11th)
- 41 individual event top 12 qualifiers; including 4 event champions
- 200 medley State record of his daughter Emily still stands
- More than 30 all American swimmers (most first team)
- Formally coached into his 70's, still producing state qualifiers. He retired from coaching Pretzels shortly after his 73rd birthday.
- Continues to give back: Taught art for FSD for 46 years, and he STILL teaches at Aquin

Dave Steenrod—1973 Graduate of Freeport High School

Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

Teacher and coach at FHS for 33 Years, coaching mostly football and swimming.

- Advocate for special education students as a teacher and department chair of the FHS Special Education department where he initiated the STEP program to provide disabled students with job experiences in the community
- Volunteered countless hours for many years for the FHS Swim Team, managed the Freeport Aquatic Facility, and taught lifeguard training to potential lifeguards. He even taught then superintendent Peter Flynn to swim, just a few years ago...giving him just one thing to work on each time they worked together.
- Dave believed in the power of athletics and mentored by seeking out students who wanted to participate but needed a bit of a push.
- 2004: FSD 145 Grade A Educator Award, and also received Meritorious Award from Illinois State Board of Education
- Active church volunteer and served on the Parkview Home Board of Directors
- Energized fundraising for the FHS stadium artificial turf in 2009 and is credited with the completion of the community in 2013 project by many in Freeport.
- Dave was born and raised in Freeport, attended Carthage College, and came back to Freeport as a community activist, coach, and mentor
- Posthumously received the Matt Marvin Community Impact Award in 2014
- During the process of establishing the Hall of Fame, Dave unexpectedly passed away during a memorable cross country bike ride.
- Dave lived "Once a Pretzel, Always a Pretzel"

Jim and Sandy (Maurer) Dixon—1966 & 1964 Graduates of Freeport High School

Kathy Helm Friend of Freeport High School Award

- Value their Freeport roots with generous donations to HCC, FSD 145, the Civil War Monument and Freeport Humane Society (where Jim's mother used to volunteer).
- The Dixon's steadfast support of education in Freeport is most notable, especially since they have moved for job reasons away from their roots in Freeport.
- Specifically, Jim has been successful in the insurance business. He started as an underwriter for Crum and Forster in Freeport after serving in the Air Force and moved up to become President of the London Agency (a division of Crum and Forster). In 1988 Jim and a colleague started an insurance company in Atlanta that was later sold to Alleghany Companies in 2003. Jim stayed on as chairman until retirement in 2008. At that time the company had 380 employees and 1.2 billion in revenues.
- Jim and Sandy choose to give back their wealth. A significant donation of nearly 5% of the total cost of the turf renovations came solely from the Dixons.
- Their scholarships for FHS seniors allow them to continue their education at Highland Community College, where Jim also attended.
- Their donations' impact on students is tremendous. Since 2006, Jim and Sandy have contributed more than \$100,000 to the Freeport Public Community School Fund to purchase needed technology and books for classrooms.
- Both Jim and Sandy believe in paying it forward. They make a difference in the lives of Freeport students. Their long term goal is to give back even more in the future, unselfishly sharing their wealth with the future of Freeport. Their gifts inspire others and demonstrate their love for Freeport.
- The couple have been married for 44 years and are blessed with 2 sons and 4 grandsons.

Harry Seiple—1943 Graduate of Freeport High School

Kathy Helm Friend of Freeport High School Award

- Harry Seiple loved the Pretzels. He looked for opportunities to volunteer and support athletics.
- Supplied the baseball team with fruit for double headers for ten years. ('77-'87)
- Served on the Pat Holmes Committee for ten years from 2004-2014
- Lifetime member of the Pretzels Fan's Club, 1976-2014 (38 years). Harry started to serve as his son's became FHS athletes and then never stopped volunteering until his passing.
- Football Season ticket holder from 1976-2014 (38 years). It should be noted that Harry's son, Larry Seiple, teaches at Freeport Alternative High School and is an Assistant Coach for the FHS Football program.
- Volunteer ticket taker for Football from 1979-1989
- Volunteer ticket taker for Boys Basketball from 1979-2014 (38 years)
- Freeport High School could always count on Harry. He showed his commitment through the simple act of volunteering...not just once, but for decades.
- A game wasn't a game without Harry there. He passed in July of 2014. Harry lived "Once a Pretzel, Always a Pretzel." Here to receive his award this evening is his son, and my colleague, Larry.

Harlan Anderson--1947 Graduate of Freeport High School

Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award

- Dedicated Chapter 2 of his autobiography (Learn, Earn & Return: My Life as a Computer Pioneer) to "The Pretzel Years" where he fondly remembers FHS teachers, classmates and events he participated in.
- Recalls in great detail the students' assembly in the gym that occurred the day after President Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, the dropping of the Atomic Bomb and the horror of the war through a teenager's eyes. (It should be noted that during his high school years 52 students' were lost to WWII...their names are perpetually engraved on a plaque outside the FHS office)
- Spoke at the Reuben Baumgartner Lecture Series in 1997 on "Technology and World Affairs" when he was back home for his 50th class reunion
- Was part of a HS dance band with a few other classmates called "Andy Anderson and the Kampus Kats" and played for many of the smaller area HS dances.

- Anderson attended the University of Illinois where he developed his interest in computers by taking courses for the ILLIAC I Computer which was under construction at the time.
- He earned a BS in Engineering Physics in 1951 and a Masters in Physics in 1952 from the U of I
- He is best known as the co-founder of Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) which at one time was the second largest computer company in the world
- He and co-founder, Ken Olsen initially met while working for MIT on the TX-O (Transistor eXperimental-0) computer.
- Their company, DEC, developed the world's first small interactive computer, the Programmed Data Processor (PDP-1) in 1960 and the PDP-8, the world's first mass produced mini-computer
- He has been associated with the Lincoln Laboratory at MIT, where he served as a member of the technical staff
- He served as director of technology of Time, Inc. where he spearheaded their evaluation of the future of the printed word during the explosion of television, long before the Internet existed.
- He has participated in early stage financing for over 20 small technology companies in an effort to pay it forward for other entrepreneurs
- He has served as a trustee of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute for 16 years and has served as a member of the Board of Advisors of the College of Engineering at the University of Illinois
- His love of music has also led him to be a trustee of the Boston Symphony Orchestra

Dan Ferguson---1944 Graduate of Freeport High School

Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award

- In the top 2% of graduates from Freeport High School in 1944
- Served in the US Navy until his release in 1946
- Graduate of Hamilton in 1948 followed by an MBA at Stanford University
- Joined Newell Co in 1950 at the age of 23.
- Became President of Newell, a \$14 million dollar family business, in 1965 and initiated a multi-product strategy for the company which had consolidated Newell Window Furnishings and Newell Manufacturing into a single corporation.
- He developed a growth by acquisition strategy based on his intent to build a strong family of multi-product companies, which he called "Newellization."
- In 1972 Newell went public and began trading on the NY Stock Exchange in June 1979
- Newell continued to acquire companies and diversify their holdings, returning the investments to the shareholders at astounding rates.
- Newell was listed number 22 on Forbes list of the best stocks of the 1980s, having provided a total return to stockholders that averaged 39.5 percent per year.
- In 1992, Dan Ferguson bowed out of active management leaving his post of vice chairman and chief executive to become Chairman, with over 17,000 employees, and sales of \$1.45 billion.
- (The rest is what Dan did when he wasn't at Newell)
- Lectured at both Stanford and Harvard business schools
- City Councilman Freeport
- An accomplished piano player, avid skier, tennis player and golfer he won the City Golf Championship 1958 (re John Knoble)
- A philanthropist by nature, Dan and his family have given generously to many causes in an effort to "pay it forward," leaving a mark on Freeport as well as many other communities and colleges.
- As a successful businessman who helped to build Freeport's prosperity during his leadership at Newell, Dan Ferguson is recognized tonight as an Outstanding Freeport High School Alumni.

1924 & 1925 Football Teams

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- The return of Glenn Pat Holmes to Freeport as a coach after his strong play as an athlete had all of Freeport in hopes of victory.
- Coach Pat (as he was known to players and fans alike) turned up the heat at the start of the 1924 season and never let up.
- Every game resulted in victory. Over the course of the season, Freeport outscored their opponents 288 to 47.
- After winning the conference, the team journeyed from Freeport to Ansonia, CT to play a team that had not been beaten on their home turf for four years. Freeport schooled Ansonia on the game 33-0.
- The trip to Ansonia was made as short as possible to give the team as much rest as they could get. They went from Freeport to Chicago, Chicago to Pittsburg, Pittsburg to New York and New York to Ansonia.
- After the game the team viewed the Yale Bowl, went sightseeing in New York, and then journeyed to Washington D.C. where they visited the White House and shook hands with President Coolidge.
- After the Connecticut trip, the 1924 Team was dubbed a National Championship Squad by the Freeport community.
- After another strong season in 1925, the team was rewarded with a trip to Pittsburgh to play Ellwood High.
- Ellwood High had not been beaten in three years, but the Pretzels delivered a victory, 13-7.
- The 1925 team was quite a bit smaller than the Ellwood team who sported 9 of their men at more than 6 feet tall. Additionally, the muddy field conditions the day of the game added to the challenge for Freeport.
- Nevertheless, the Freeport squad battled until the end, grateful that the time on the clock ran out just in time to let them retain their lead for the win.

1926 Basketball Team

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- The athletic prowess of the young men playing football followed them onto the basketball court as many of the same football champions were also basketball players.
- They lost only two regular season games in 1926, beating their opponents during the season by a total number of points of 272-180.
- They beat Joliet in the sectional tournament, another Big Seven Conference comrade.
- Downstate, the Pretzels drew a game against Athens, who fielded a team of taller young men who dwarfed the Pretzels.
- Down at halftime, the Pretzels rallied in the second half to victory and a chance to win it all in the final game.
- The Pretz faced Canton in the final game. Just like the previous game against Athens, they were down at halftime.
- A pep talk from coach Pat Holmes got the team ready for the second half. Freeport kept a 14-12 advantage in the 3rd quarter and then drove over Canton in the fourth quarter to win 24-13...only allowing them one point scored in the 4th quarter.
- Freeport won it all over Canton in the big gymnasium at the University of Illinois.
- Three of the Freeport players (both forwards and a center) were selected to the all-state team at the end of the season.
- In addition to the State Title, one of the features of the whole season was the three game series between Rockford and Freeport, where Freeport battled to win 2 of the 3 matchups.

1951 Basketball Team

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- Background Expectations were extremely high in the spring of 1951. Many members our basketball team had competed in the previous year's Illinois state basketball tournament, as juniors. Just about every pre-season poll predicted a state championship for FHS. Our downtown merchants decorated their stores with orange and black bunting. Store windows displayed oversize 30-inch wide pretzels, baked by the local Fullerton Pastry Shop... Something else we should keep in mind is that in the 1950s, the IHSA held a single basketball tournament. High schools were not bracketed according to their enrollment size. There were no separate 1A, 2A, 3A, or 4A playoffs, as we know it today. Schools of all sizes, from the largest to the smallest, were pitted against each other... It's a credit to coach Harry Kinert and the players for living up to their potential. History is replete with examples of the favorites loosing focus and falling short of expectations. The Kinert Kids delivered!
- The entire community was eager to take part in welcoming back our conquering heroes and their trophy. Hundreds of fans' automobiles awaited. They were parked bumper-to-bumper on both sides of U.S. Highway 26 -- for 20 miles. All the way from Forreston to Freeport! And, in those days it was a tradition for the championship team to celebrate when they returned by riding aboard one of the town's fire engines.
- As the Pretzel's team bus progressed its way through Forreston, all those parked cars gradually joined-in, forming a motorcade. When the bus reached Freeport, the players hurriedly exited and climbed aboard an awaiting city fire engine. However, that fire engine was forced to stay put. No way could this vast motorcade navigate through downtown streets -- without risking a mammoth traffic jam. Instead, after the Journal Standard newspaper snapped photos, the team was transported directly to the steps of the old Stephenson County Courthouse -- with the FHS band and cheerleaders leading a spirited celebration -- before a crowd of thousands of happy well-wishers.
- Coach Harry Kinert was the first to admit he was blessed with a well-oiled, balanced scoring engine. On a given night, any member of the starting five might gain high-point honors. The streaking fast-break offense often found several Pretzels clustered near the basket, ready to score, while the opposition hurried to catch up. But more importantly, they played as a TEAM.
- Ben Dorsey was acclaimed as the greatest floor general in high school basketball. Ben served as the Pretzels' maestro, as he directed the team's offensive and defensive strategies. Ben was a true "point guard," before the term was later coined to define the position.
- Tom Williams, gifted with exceptional natural speed and agility, often out-jumped and out-foxed his much-taller foes. Once, while leaping high for a rebound, Tom accidentally knocked himself out for several seconds -- when his forehead struck the back-board.
- Gene Schmitt, with his quiet, unassuming manner, seemed to be the glue that helped hold the team together when the going got rough.
- Harlan "Hod" Fritz was a dedicated all-round player. When opponents tried double-teaming Dorsey or Deacon Davis to deny a clear shot, it was "Hod" who discouraged them by scoring in bunches.
- McKinley "Deacon" Davis is remembered for preaching a 28-point sermon against Moline in the state championship game. Afterwards, a sportswriter told him that Freeport had come within just one point of breaking the total scoring record. "If I had known that," quipped Davis, "I would have made one more basket."
- It should also be noted that the 1951 Pretzels could have won many games by putting their 2nd-string players on the floor. For example: Jim Hill, Bill Spahn, and Gene Ingold had been regular starters as sophomores. Add Meads and Carl Cain, and you'd have a very formidable line-up.

2008 Bowling Team

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- Here are some highlights of the boys 2007-2008 season State Championship team:
 - 1st at the Guilford Survivor tournament
 - 1st at Dixon toughman tournament
 - 3rd at the Vernon Hills tournament
 - 2nd at the Harlem tournament
 - undefeated in the conference match play
 - won the sectionals in Dixon
 - and of course won State Tournament in O'Fallon Illinois
 - Roster: Robbie Meinert senior, Ryan Buss senior, Tim Holbert senior, Matt Keith senior, Jesse Castle senior, Tyler Hendrickson Jr, Kurtis Goeswisch Junior, Sydney DeVries sophomore
 - head coach John Kreeger assistant coaches Dennis Endress and Bob Kuelling.
 - FHS Records they hold: 2nd highest team series at 3988
 - State Series High Game: Rob Meinert with a 279 and a High Series of 725
 - Individual State Qualifiers included three of the team: Ryan Buss (11th place), Rob Meinert (16th place) and Sidney DeVries (19th place)
- Freeport High School had not been home to a State Championship Team for any sport for more than 50 years until the 2008 bowling team rolled their way through the state title.
- Jesse Castle was quoted in the yearbook in 2008 as really appreciating the nice restaurant meal the team had after winning the state title!

Deacon Davis--1951 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- All State Center for the FHS State Champion Boys' Basketball Team in 1951
- 1951-1954 Attended and graduated from the University of Iowa, playing basketball all four years
- 1955-1957 Played for the Harlem Globetrotters professional basketball team, touring cities in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and South America.
- Fun fact: Deacon wore knee pads on his knees all through his playing days to protect his knees.
- 1968-1978 Director of Special Programs at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb Illinois
- Founded the NIU CHANCE program (Complete Help And Assistance for a College Education)
- 1978-1983 Executive Director of Intercollegiate Athletics at NIU
- 1983-2003 Joined Primerica Financial Services/Citigroup as a National Sales Director with offices in Rockford, Chicago, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- 1963-1983 (20 years!) Chairman of the Iowa Black Alumni Association
- 1999 University of Iowa Distinguished Alumni Award
- LEGACY: 2004 NIU CHANCE program is renamed to the McKinley "Deacon" Davis CHANCE program
- NIU CHANCE program today has more than 20 staff devoted to ensuring that students are successful at NIU through counseling, tutoring, and mentoring programming.
- Students engaged in the CHANCE program start as Freshmen in order to ensure a strong transition from HS to College
- Deacon saw the promise in youth and dedicated much of his life to service.
- The Deacon Davis Park on South Adams Avenue in Freeport is named in his honor

Carl Cain—1952 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- Illinois High School "All-State Team":
- 1951 State Champions
- 1952 State finalists
- 1974 - Inducted into State of Illinois High School Athletic Hall of Fame
- University of Iowa "All-American":
- 1955 - Second Team All-Big Ten Conference
- 1955 Captain
- 1955 and 1956 - Most Valuable Player (MVP)
- 1956 - First Team All American
- 1956 - Iowa's MVP
- 1956 Tri-Captain
- Cain as a starting member of Iowa's "Fabulous Five" Final Four team (1956) continues to be the only team in Iowa basketball history to play in the NCAA National Championship game. The Hawkeyes were defeated by the University of San Francisco led by Bill Russell and KC Jones.
- 1980 - Cain's No. 21 jersey retired along with Fabulous Five teammates: (the late) Sharm Scheuerman, Bill Seaberg, Bill Logan, and Bill Schoof.
- 1989 - Selected into the "charter" class of the University of Iowa's Athletic Hall of Fame.
- 2002 - Selected to Iowa's All-Century Team.
- Olympian 1956 - Melbourne Australia
- 1956 - Olympic Gold Medalist with teammates and friends Bill Russell and future brother-in-law, KC Jones.
- 1986 - Inducted into the US Olympic Hall of Fame with teammates Bill Russell and KC Jones.
- NBA Draft:
- 2nd round of the NBA Draft, Cain was selected by the Rochester Royals. The team eventually moved to Cincinnati Ohio and a few years later drafted Oscar Robertson.
- Carl Cain -- "Following graduation from the University of Iowa, I enlisted in the US Army after having been selected to the US Olympic Basketball team where we won gold in 1956. My wife Katherine and I moved to California where I spent over 10 years as a Probation Officer for the LA County Probation Department. I returned to the Midwest and briefly lived in the Chicagoland area before moving to Des Moines, Iowa, where my wife and three daughters remained for the next 30 years. While in Des Moines, I remained very active in the community and served as President of the Board at Homes of Oakridge, an affordable housing complex, for almost 10 years. Also during that time, I served on the Board of Iowa Children and Family Services. After retiring from Midwest Energy Company as the Director of Consumer Affairs for 15 years, my wife and I relocated to Pickerington Ohio, a suburb of Columbus, to be near our three daughters, two granddaughters and son-in-laws. Our family has been very blessed."

Jennifer Crouse--1995 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- All Conference: Soccer (1), Volleyball (2) and basketball (3)
- Two Years as Basketball MVP for the conference
- All State Basketball Junior and Senior Years
- Jennifer still hold the school records in scoring, rebounding and blocked shots for career, season and game.
- She has been inducted into the Illinois Basketball Hall of Fame
- Graduated from University of North Dakota in 2001 with an undergraduate degree in commercial aviation.
- Helped to lead University of North Dakota to three consecutive NCAA Division II championships in 1997, 1998 and 1999.
- Two-time NCAA DII Elite Eight Most Outstanding Player (1998, 1999).
- A two-time NCAA DII National Player of the Year (1997-98, 1998-99).
- Played overseas in Spain, Greece, Germany, and Australia, again setting records in field goal shooting percentage, rebounding and blocked shots
- Has worked for Graduate International Tour Management Institute - allowing me the opportunity to work for companies that provide tours to adults and student groups.
- Personal trainer and group exercise instructor
- Currently enrolled in post-graduate classes at Columbia International University, Columbia, South Carolina pursuing a degree in Chaplaincy. (to be a chaplain)
- Fred Klipp – “In Jennifer's senior year, we were rated 2nd in the State and expected to have a very good season. When we came to the Dixon Christmas tournament, they had scheduled us to play Stark County a very good small school in the first round. Their leading scorer was a 6 foot senior center. Early in the first quarter they passed the ball to her inside. She faked one way turned and shot and Jennifer blocked it. This happened on two more occasions and she was clearly frustrated. The next time the ball came into her she faked then passed it back out. This happened right in front of her bench. The coach stood up looked right at her and told her to shoot the ball – she looked right back at him and said “she won't let me!””

Jesse Buss – 2003 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- 2001/2002 NIC-9 Bowling MVP
- Bowled a 300 game on 12/19/2002 vs. South Beloit
- 289 on 1/9/03 vs. Auburn
- High Average in the 2002-03 season was 228.82 (Remains a Freeport High School High Season Average Record)
- High Series: (Holds current 1st, 3rd and 5th records)
- 774 on 12/16/2002 vs. South Beloit
- 765 on 1/23/2003 vs Winnebago
- 752 on 1/9/2003 vs. Auburn
- 2002/2003 IHSA All-State Team
- 2003 IHSA 3rd place Individual State Qualifier
- 2002/2003 IHSA 2nd Place Team
- 2003 Illinois Star of Tomorrow
- 2007 Jr. Team USA Member
- 2008 Intercollegiate National Champion - Wichita State University
- Graduated with a BS in Business Administration from Wichita State
- 6th place 2009 USBC Masters
- Joined the PBA in 2008
- 2008/2009 PBA Southwest Region Rookie of the Year
- 4 PBA Regional Titles
- 2nd place with Motown Muscle in the Inaugural PBA League
- According to PBA.com:
- One of Jesse's most memorable moments was winning the Midwest Region Stars and Stripes Open at Scott Air Force Base, Il...a tournament his late father Richie also won in the mid-1990s
- Continues to instruct future bowlers and serves as a Highland Community College Coach where he continues to influence the future of bowling in our community.

Fred Klipp

Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

- Freeport School District Career: 1969-2002
- Girls' Basketball Coaching Career Record: 446 wins, 204 losses
- 7 Conference Championships
- 35 game winning streak 1993-96
- 7 IHSA Regional Titles
- 3 IHSA Sectional Titles
- 2 IHSA State 3rd Place Titles (1993-1995 Team Record of 65 wins and 3 losses: undefeated regular season 1994-95, 28-0)
- 11 Tournament championships
- 9 20+win seasons
- 4 time NIC-10 Girls Basketball Coach of the Year
- Rockford Register Star Girls Sport Coach of the Year- twice
- IHSA Basketball Hall of Fame in 2001
- Pretzel Fans Club Glenn Pat Holmes Award 2012
- As an educator, started at Freeport Junior High in 1969 as a physical science teacher, coaching Junior High football, basketball and track
- Came to FHS in 1995 teaching Biology and coaching football, basketball, and baseball
- In 1997 became a FHS Guidance Counselor until retiring in 2002
- Fred Klipp – “Stories about my actual coaching, clipboards that slipped from my hands, meditation, pinchy-winchy, motivational quotes, team building sessions are better remembered by the players. Their acceptance of team first concepts and dedication to what we wanted to accomplish as a team, or the reason I am being recognized. I will forever be indebted to them.”
- Fred Klipp – “In my first years of coaching girls basketball, Bill was the athletic director. With the budget at the time, when I needed equipment of some kind I would go to Bill. At the beginning of one season, as I was putting everything together, I realized that I needed tape cutters. So off I went to Bill. He looked at me grabbed his keys and we headed for the first aid closet -no, the locker room – no – the pop machine? Bill opened the pop machine reached in the back and headed me a brand new tape cutter. Everyone had a system and that was Bill's.”

**Patty Norman – 1966 Graduate of Freeport High School
Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award**

- Patricia L Norman worked in Freeport School District for over 32 years.
- While in the district she taught at Taylor Park Elementary School, Carl Sandburg Middle school and Freeport Junior High.
- In 1992 she became the Director of Human Resources and served in that position for five years.
- Subsequently, she became the principal at Freeport High School in 1995 and remained in that position until January of 2002.
- In 2002, she returned to the position of Director of Human Resources and remained in that position until her retirement in June of 2015.
- Pat is proud of several accomplishments while working in Freeport School District #145:
- In 1995, she became the first African-American principal in the district AND first female Principal of Freeport High School when she served as Principal of Freeport High School.
- While principal at Freeport High School, Karen Johnson and Betty Mickel made application with the United States Navy to implement a Naval Junior reserve officers training Corps (NJROTC) program at Freeport High School.
- Several months after the application was completed and submitted, an interview and on-site tour was scheduled with a commander from United States Navy Department. The interview took place on September 10, 2001 the day before the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.
- Three months later Freeport High School was approved as a site for the NJROTC program. As a result, hundreds of students have excelled in this program that instills in students the values of citizenship, service to the United States, personal responsibility and a sense of accomplishment. (we should note that an all girls NJROTC team reigns as the National Champions currently).
- Also, while in the District, Pat was instrumental in the development of the New Teacher Mentoring and Induction Academy. This program provided mentors for new teachers in the District along with an ongoing orientation program to provide professional development on how we educate students for the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow. She was also instrumental in establishing a mentoring program for paraprofessional in the District.
- Pat was also very proud of the relationships that she developed with the various bargaining unions in the District.
- In her “spare time” outside of work commitments:
- Past board member of several local organizations: New Horizons Counseling Center, Senior Resource Center, and United Way
- Still serves on the Norman Sleezer Youth Services Board of Directors and is a Board member of the Boys and Girls Club of Freeport and Stephenson County

**Ernest Seeman – Graduate of Freeport High School
Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award**

- Teacher in the Freeport School District for 36 years (1940-1976)
- Moved to Freeport when he was six after the death of his father from influenza
- Began taking violin lessons at 8 and held the position of first chair in the newly formed Freeport Jr. High Orchestra
- Learned multiple instruments and was Concertmaster and principal French Horn in the Freeport High School band for three years
- Named 1st chair in the Illinois All State Orchestra in 1931 and 1932
- Attended Illinois Wesleyan and earned his BA in Music Education in 1937
- Initially he taught band in Peotone, IL for three years and then was hired back home in 1940 as the Assistant Band Director under Karl Kubitz
- In 1950 he became the Freeport High School Orchestra Director
- He served as the chair of the Music Department for the District from 1965 until he retired in 1976
- He continued to teach lessons to area school children until 1998, a year prior to his passing.
- If you're doing some math at this point, you should have figured out that from 1940 when he was hired by FSD145 until 1998 when he stopped teaching lessons, Ernest had shaped the development of music in Freeport youth for 58 years
- After his death in 1999, his wife Phyllis established a memorial fund in Ernest's name to promote the string program in the Freeport School District
- Ernest was a regional music leader as well
- He joined the Rockford Symphony Orchestra in 1941
- Became Concertmaster for the RSO in 1944, a position he held for 25 years
- He also served for 14 years as the Concertmaster for the Dubuque Symphony Orchestra
- And he was the Principal violinist for the University of Wisconsin at Platteville Symphony Orchestra
- FHS Orchestra is more than 150 years old...one of the oldest in the country and Ernest deserves much credit for the program's longevity

Deb Stukenberg

Kathy Helm Friend of Freeport High School Award

- Founder, Kids Coats and Clothes of Freeport, IL, and a 1970 graduate of Freeport High School
- Deb always believed that children should be our focus
- After her kidney transplant (due to lupus complications) she looked for opportunities to serve and help others because she felt she had been given a second chance at life.
- One of her first “projects” was a homeless student could use some assistance with a prom tux. But she didn’t stop there, she continued to follow him through college
- In 2008, Deb was lucky enough to win the Farm and Fleet grand re-opening prize of \$3000.
- Her husband Ed had visions of his man cave and garage projects in mind with the winnings, but Deb had other plans...she formed the Kids, Coats, and Clothes charity to benefit our Freeport school children who lacked clothing.
- Deb launched into her new venture by talking to anyone who would listen. The community responded with donations of both money and clothing.
- A year later, in 2009, the charity reached non-profit status and churches and individuals continued to donate.
- An annual fall give-away is still held at Faith United Methodist.
- The charity has expanded to not just fill clothing needs, but also helps with basic school supplies and uniforms.
- When cold weather hits, the ladies are super busy, making as many as 5-6 runs a day to schools for needy students.
- Deb insisted in a fast turnaround, because she was haunted by stories of siblings having to take turns sharing a coat or children who didn’t attend school on cold days
- Deb received local accolades from the American Business Women’s Association chapter in Freeport as Woman of the Year while she was still with us.
- 100% of all donations go back to the program
- Their space is donated rent free by Representative Brian Stewart, who has taken the Kids, Coats, and Clothes program under his wing from the beginning because he remembers struggles from his own childhood.
- One of the most remarkable things about Deb’s mission is that she never wanted to meet the children or families she helped. She wants to remain faceless and works through the schools to identify students in need.
- To us, Deb and her helpers are angels sent to our children, many times delivering the needed items within the hour to the school. We know their kind faces and we get to see the rewarding smiles of the children they help day after day. All that we do is place a quick call and provide the sizes or needs. They do all the rest.
- According to her husband, if Deb were still here today, she’d be surprised by how large the program has grown.
- Her mission is fulfilled daily: “To help the less fortunate who attend preschool through high school in our community by providing some of the necessary items with hopes of empowerment and not enabling.”
- Deb has left such a legacy for our children. We can only repay her with our thank you and by honoring her here tonight.

**Albert Lenoir --1948 Graduate of Freeport High School
Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award**

- Albert started taking care of his family starting at age 15, when the oldest started helping to provide for the family when his dad passed away.
- After graduating from Freeport High School in June 1948, Albert joined the Air Force and served six years in the military before his honorable discharge in 1953 as a staff sergeant. He wore his uniform with pride.
- He was a radio, radar and electronics technician and continued to fix small home electronics for many in Freeport (what other considered junk he was able to get working again) because electronics work was a talent of his.
- Two years later, in 1955, Albert married Patricia St. James AND became a police officer. Wearing a uniform in service was just what Albert did.
- Albert Sydney Lenoir was the first black police officer in the Freeport Police Department.
- Early in his career, Albert dealt with intense racism.
- He was not well accepted, sometimes by the community but mostly by other officers. Jim Crow type notes and slurs were not uncommon. He was put into positions to see if he would get ticked enough to quit. He always kept cool and level headed.
- His first night of work, none of the other officers came to work. It took the threat of the loss of their jobs to convince the officers to report.
- Albert kept a lot inside. He just took care of moving forward day after day.
- Albert understood community policing. Other officers didn't like the fact that he sometimes took someone straight home rather than arresting them for something they didn't need to be arrested for.
- Eventually he earned the respect of the other officers, and was promoted to Interim Police Chief. He was not selected for Police Chief after serving in that role for quite some time.
- He was not one to give up on anything. He read and learned constantly. Crosswords in the paper were his favorite. One time he finished so many crosswords and entered them in the Chicago Tribune contest that they told him not to apply anymore. He loved trivial information and memorized it. He loved to read dictionaries!
- He loved to quiz his family and friends. Anything he read stuck with him, and he read a lot. Probably a photographic memory or at least an amazing memory. He loved to bet you that he knew something you didn't know.
- He was very talented and it is hard to hold a person down when they keep coming at you. He was respected and loved because of his calm approach and ability to meet any challenge.
- Albert passed in April of 2012.

**Dr. Julia Phillips --1972 Graduate of Freeport High School
Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award**

- B. S. Physics, College of William and Mary, M.S. and Ph.D. Applied Physics, Yale University
- She is most proud of her great family who supported her successful career
- Original research on thin films for electronics and other applications, resulting in more than 100 papers in peer reviewed journals plus several invited book chapters and reviews
- Leadership of research organizations, culminating in serving as Vice President of Research at Sandia National Laboratories (a 10,000 person national security laboratory)
- Elected member of the National Academy of Engineering and Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (highest level of recognition in my field) plus elected fellow of three professional societies
- Married to the love of her life for almost 30 years with 2 accomplished and successful daughters – one a violinist and the other a chemist
- She is proud of always serving others: Mentoring dozens of students, postdoctoral associates, and colleagues over the years, ranging from high school students to senior scientists and engineers
- Serving her profession through leadership of several professional societies (president, boards of directors, etc.), most recently as a member of the National Science Board (a Presidential-level appointment) and as Home Secretary of the National Academy of Engineering
- Lifelong learning: Learning new fields from computer architectures to nuclear research reactors well enough to be able to lead Sandia's research effort and to chair technical studies for the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (the studies provide technical advice to policymakers in Congress and the Executive Branch of the US Government)
- For fun: Travel, including visiting all 50 states and 10 Canadian provinces (plus a number of other countries) and living in all four continental U.S. time zones while expanding her flute repertoire beyond classical to be able to play a variety of styles with John (her husband), including Celtic and even a little jazz
- Dr. Julia Phillips is a nationally respected engineer who has represented Freeport Pretzels well on a global stage.

**Frank “Ned” Furst --1956 Graduate of Freeport High School
Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award**

- Mr. Furst started at Furst-McNess in 1966 after earning a BA from Yale in American Studies, an MBA from the University of Michigan, and his CPA while working for Arthur Anderson Company.
- The two most important things in Ned’s life have been his family and the successful growth of the Furst-McNess Company in Freeport, IL
- Furst-McNess’s growth resulted from redirecting and building the company from its base as a rural route consumer products and feed business to a thriving and focused feed ingredients business.
- In the late 60s, Furst-McNess started to sell their vitamin mineral pre-mixes directly to the livestock producer, then in the early 90s, acquired a commodities grain business to broaden their product line, and then added ethanol byproducts in the 2000s, and by 2010 decided to leave the consumer products business behind and more recently have entered the antibiotic free swine industry.
- Through all of the decisions, the flexibility to rethink, change direction, and continue to look toward growth has directly impacted the growth and financial impact of the Furst-McNess business on our local economy.
- Ned continues to serve as Chairman of the Board and has turned over daily operations, with the founding values still very much in place: Product integrity and the fair treatment of employees, customers, and communities Furst-McNess operates in.
- Ned is pleased to have helped Furst-McNess continue to grow with the third generation of the Furst family involved in the business.
- Ned has also devoted time to the community.
- He served on the School Board where he was part of a team of board members who created a positive environment where the Board worked with the teachers to improve the school system.
- He served on the hospital board as chairman and worked through reorganization while serving in that role, Has served on the Stephenson County Board as chairman of finances, and he assisted Today’s Bank of Freeport and Vermont American Corporation of Louisville, KY prior to those organizations being sold. He has also worked with the Freeport Art Museum, Lincoln-Douglas Society and is a member of Grace Episcopal Church.
- His family is most important to him. He was married to Hapsie for more than 50 years prior to her passing in 2012 and raised three wonderful daughters, two of whom have worked for the company at various points of their careers, (with Martha continuing to serve as Vice Chairman of the Board), and one other daughter who is an art educator.
- Today, he enjoys traveling with his companion, JoAnn Savoy (a retired University of Wisconsin librarian), playing duplicate bridge in Rockford and regional tournaments, and continuing to be a life long learner and public servant.

Rufus Pearson – 1962 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- Rufus was the most sought after senior in the nation his senior year. He was Heisman Trophy material. He was the superstar running back who comes along only once in awhile.
- Preston and Rufus were so sports minded and they would tell Edward to go sit on the curb while they played with older boys...they always played up and honed their skills. Everyone came over to our house to get them to play all the time.
- They set in the basement, made their own weights and worked out with homemade weights.
- One historian described his defensive prowess, "When Rufus hit you - he hit you hard. The next time you would get out of the way."
- Edward remembers the line of people waiting to get into the football games would wrap down to Blackhawk school.
- Rufus and Gayle Sayers (who graduated from Omaha Central HS), battled it out for the most yardage season after season. Gayle ended up winning by four yards because Rufus injured his leg toward the end of his senior season.
- Rufus was fast as lightning. During a football game with LaSalle Peru, the ball was dropped and Rufus caught up to the fellow from LaSalle Peru from 50 yards away and stopped the touchdown...they only ended up with a field goal.
- Nate Johnson gave Rufus a watch to time himself and he timed himself ALL THE TIME. Racing himself, racing others that was what Rufus was known for.
- One morning, Edward and his friends were throwing rocks at the train because we were bored. They saw Rufus in a stance. They didn't know about his morning training routine. Rufus raced the train. He gave the train a head start and he caught the train and looked at the conductor before he took off with the speed of lightning.
- Out there in the back behind Taylor Park School were some horses. Others would say: Let's go get Rufus...he'll run the horses down for us so we can ride them.
- Rufus always practiced running. He gave Edward and his friends a mile head start. We didn't think he could catch us. We thought we could even stop and eat some ice cream. We threw our ice cream down...Edward remembers getting chewed out for not "keeping running" like Rufus told me to.
- Rufus went to camp at SIU one summer and when he came home he just wasn't the same. He looked different, and acted different.
- Rufus hit hard, it may have been a concussion, or something similar. We don't know, but we also know that medicine now isn't what it was then. Something changed Rufus forever.
- Honored to receive the award for Rufus. The family is grateful.
- Rufus and Preston were always sports minded. They were always playing football, basketball...something...every day.

Journal Standard Articles from the FHS 1961 Football Season -- Rufus Pearson's senior year

- He played on both offense and defense. He was equally good on both sides of the ball.
- He was a running back and used to run back punts and kickoffs on special teams. He racked up many yards and TDs throughout his career.
- One such article on 10/13/61 where the Pretzels won 7-6 wrote: "Pearson was the only Pretzel defender with even a chance of stopping the LaSalle Peru's star quarterback."
- Another article indicated that Rufus could match up with the best of any player in the conference.
- Adjectives to describe him in Journal Standard articles described him as "fast", "outstanding", "speedster", and "versatile".
- At one point during the 1961 season, Rufus was in sole possession as the conference individual scoring leader.
- The 1961 football team won its first 7 games while losing its last 2. The 1961 football team was the 7th winningest football program in 48 years history at FHS.
- Rufus was a huge contributor to the team's success.

Leroy Dixon – 1981 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- Qualifying for state in the 4x100 meter relay plus the 400 and 200 meter dash
- Taking 3rd in the 400M relay at state (wasn't slated to place)
- Winning the 400M dash (1st since 1947)
- Winning 4 individual events at the conference meet (1st ever)
- Being selected to all conference in 3 sports; football, basketball and track
- Setting school records in basketball (47 points) and track 10.5 in the 100M dash and 47.3 in 400 meter dash
- Running back a 97 yard kickoff return in our senior year homecoming football game to win the game for us.
- Being selected as the male athlete of the year in 1981
- Attending the University of Wisconsin Madison on a track and football scholarship
- Breaking the world record in the 400 yd. and 600 yard dash
- Qualifying for the 1984 and 1996 Olympic trials
- Winning the 400M dash at the World University games in Kobe, Japan (84)
- Records that still stand: 400M and 600M at Wisconsin and 300yard dash and 4x400M relay at ISU. At FHS: Mr. Dixon still holds the 400M Dash record he set in 1981 as well as the 100 M Dash record also in 1981. at FHS...our most beloved Pretzel Bowl Track.
- Meeting and marrying his wife, Sara Dixon, who has blessed him with 3 wonderful children; Alexa, Austin and Alijah and he says has helped to mold him into the man he has become is definitely a highlight of his life.
- In Dixon's own words: Having Lynn Wilson as my Guidance Counselor was the main reason I was able to accomplish the things I did in high school. He promised my mother before she passed that he would mentor and guide me through school. He did this by introducing me to some very caring people in the community (Lyle King, Jack Meyers, Pete McClanathon, Bill Green) and by accepting me into his own family. Without him I would not have had the same success in high school.
- He is proud to say that the career path he chose has allowed him to be a mentor and a coach to many students at Enderlin Public School. It gives me great satisfaction knowing that I may be that "mentor" in a student's life, just as Lynn Wilson was for me.

Willie Veasley -- 2006 Graduate of Freeport High School

Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award

- FHS all-time leading scorer boys' basketball and four year starter with 1860 points
- NIC-9 All-Conference 3 times (sophomore, junior, senior) and NIC-9 MVP (senior year)
- Averaged 25 point/game (senior year) and selected 1st team all state by the Champaign News-Gazette
- Butler University Basketball
 - NCAA Championship Game (2006)
 - only FHS alum to play in the NCAA championship
- Butler made the NCAA playoffs each of the years while Willie was playing for them and Willie as a player accrued more wins than any other Butler player
- 1st Team All Horizon League Defensive Team
- 2010 Speedway Horizon League Men's Basketball Championship All-Tournament Team
- 1st Butler Player to Play in 4 Consecutive NCAA Tournaments
- NCAA Final 4 Participant
- NCAA National Championship Runner Up to Duke in 2010
- Winningest Player in Butler History (118 Wins)
- Production stats are important in athletics, but it should be noted that Coach Brad Stevens (current Boston Celtics head coach) indicated Willie was the best example of servant leadership that he has seen in his coaching career.
- Willie played professionally in Japan during 2010-11 and 2011-2012 Drafted in the 5th Round of the NBA Development League by the Rio Grand Valley Vipers
- While in Freeport for a few years after leaving Japan, Willie was very active with the youth in the community. It was not uncommon to see him playing basketball with kids at the Boys' and Girls' Club and FHS. Many kids look up to him and he is a great role model.
- Willie is still involved with the game of basketball. High School coach, Jeff Lawfer, isn't surprised. He remarked: "Willie is basketball and basketball is Willie. He is such a role model for the sport. He always does it right, on and off the court."
- Professionally, Willie goes by Will Veasley now...but back home in Pretzel territory, he will always be Willie to us.
- Willie is currently an assistant coach at North Dakota State's men's basketball program.

Farrell Benefiel

Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

- FSD#145 career: 28 years (1956-1984)
- Back when Farrell was looking for a job, the IL State Supt Of Education recommended he look at Freeport HS...a top 5 school in the state at the time.
- Taught for 28 years in PE and Industrial Arts, and was continually asked to lead efforts of the school district and community
- Examples:
 - Developed a night-time woods class for adults
 - Ran summer school by asking teachers to get 25 students for their course which took enrollment from 450-1550 students in three year in the mid-70s
 - Organized and supervised student hall monitors who helped monitor halls during passing time
 - Helped lead committees to discuss progressive education and race relations
 - Wrote 150+ letters a year to colleges for student athletes--regional athletes, not just Freeport kids
 - Worked with Nadine Boyer to make sure that every sophomore PE student with a bit of talent joined an athletic team...and he wasn't shy about telling coaches like Nate Johnson: "If I send you a kid, play him. He is better than what you have on the field now."
 - For 11 years from 1960-71 ran the City of Freeport recreation department and built it from 4 employees at 3 playgrounds to 25 employees at 9 playgrounds
- Coaching: Football, Baseball, Basketball, Tennis and Wrestling...numerous regional, sectional and state appearances
 - Football: lucky enough to coach both Rufus and Preston Pearson as well as Ron Norman Jr. while winning more than 75% of games
 - Basketball: Coached with Wes Luedeking and Bill Chance and taught the game to legendary FHS athletes like Preston Pearson, Kim Hughes, Ron and Tom Norman and Cal Cummins
 - Tennis: Noteworthy that in 1962 Bob Luedeke went all the way to State, and came back to Freeport to teach and coach
 - Baseball: coached again with Bill Chance for three years
 - Wrestling: coached several more championship athletes like Brad Hardbach
- 1974 was named Man of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce for his community work.
- To this day, whoever the Freeport High School Athletic Director is still takes Farrell his favorite analgesic salve for joints from the supply at Freeport High School...just like the balm that he used when he coached
- Farrell taught and coached at a time when physical education became co-ed and much more inclusive. He made sure students were involved in their school and then opened the door to their next move after high school by paving the way to college opportunities.

Ron Norman, Sr.

Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

- FSD#145 career: 30 years (1955-1985)
- Ron Sr. Came to Freeport in 1955 after winning the Iowa State Championship at Ames, Iowa HS. The new Freeport Superintendent came from Ames and asked Ron to join him.
- Ron was known at Freeport High School for his year as a basketball and golf coach.
- Comprised 195-110 record in 12 years in head boys' basketball career. This is the highest winning percentage of any FHS coach with more than 8 years at the helm. Won a regional every year he coached and 2 sectional titles, but of course it was a one class system back then.
- Some basketball highlights (It was the Big 8 conference back then) include conference championships in '63 and '65. The 1965 team advanced to the super-sectional and was undefeated in conference (14-0) and 26-2 overall.
- Golf teams under Ron's leadership won 7 conference championships and 6 teams advanced to State along with several individuals over the years.
- He made sure kids went on to play at the next level and is directly responsible for contacting universities to help push forward a Freeport athlete to play at the next level on scholarship
- Athletic Director highlights included witnessing the beginning of ladies athletics at the HS level, from zero to nine in his tenure (one of his biggest regrets is that his own daughters did not get to participate in sports).
- He was instrumental in rebuilding Pretzel Stadium including a new track (replacing the old cinder track)
- He was instrumental in the building of the West Gym
- Instrumental in building Hustle Field--our high school baseball diamond.
- Ron Sr's daughter Pat remembers: that Ron Jr. played on his '65 basketball team and was named all State! She remembers like any father/son coaching arrangement, sometimes it wasn't positive for their relationship.
- Ron was proud of all of his children's success. He always pushed them to give back and pay it forward and was especially proud that two of his kids followed in his footsteps too (coaching and working with students). (Pete serves as athletic director at HCC and Pat also teaches)
- Ron Sr's kids remember their Dad working long and hard for Freeport High School, but always having time for his own children to guide and mentor them. He was a wonderful dad as well as coach.
- Freeport High School remembers his dedication to student athletes and willingness to always put in the extra time with them to hone their skills and a kind recommendation to help them play at the next level on scholarship.

Nadine Boyer, Sandra Toerber, and Donna Reed
Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

- Nadine Boyer – FSD career 12 years (1968-1980)
- Sandra Toerber – FSD career 25 years (1969-1978 & 1989-2005)
- Donna Reed – FSD career 34 years (1964-1998)
- Initially, the three teachers taught girls PE, then co-ed PE changed their landscape a bit. (But Nadine says it wasn't that much different)
- The three PE teachers first started by forming the GAA, Girls' Athletic Association, and received accolades for their quick progress in opening up athletic opportunities for girls
- Then along came the Congressional Act of 1972, named Title IX, which gave girls the same athletic opportunities as boys.
- The three PE teachers were quickly turned into girls' athletic team coaches overnight.
- Despite wearing hand-me-down boys' uniforms and the shortage of equipment sized for girls, the girls' coaches quickly racked up wins.
- From 1973-1979, the three coaches teamed up to garner a total of 11 conference championships in track and field, volleyball and tennis.
- Stories: Nadine remembers that one day the trio walked into Mr. Prynne's office (the Principal) to put a poem about their dislike of room 125--the overflow room for students who didn't fit into the cafeteria or library..the problem was Mr. Prynne was about to interview a new teacher (who they passed in the waiting area on the way to put their poem in his office!) and he gently reminded them that he wanted to hire new teachers, and he didn't want them thinking he didn't have control...even though he liked the poem!
- Nadine remembers girls singing on the bus, teaching good sportmanship, teaching stewardship (pick up the bus, help set up the hurdles (home or away) AND she remembers preparing for a big meet by abandoning the typical practice plan and heading into the gym to play volleyball (the boys team was stunned...because after all they had a big meet!) but then they set at least 5 new school records. Unconventional, and kept the sport fun.
- All three ladies remember the camaraderie of fellow PE teachers and coaches Farrell Benefiel and Dick Regez.
- Donna remembers taking the volleyball team one game away from State.
- Donna also remembers Freeport's dominance in badminton, especially in 1975 when they took the conference title...but then badminton teams were retired from conference play.
- Sandy's remembers when we started the girls interscholastic program Ron Norman said that would be fine as long as we did not spend anything because there was no budget for it. He did find some money for officials but the first year that was about it.
- Sandy also remembers in their Physical education classes for basketball they played two guards two forwards half court with a rover who could play both sides of the center line. When they started the sports program they transitioned to five players.
- Sandy's stories: Farrell Benefiel gave us some old jerseys. The other day I was talking with a former player and she said how much they hated those Jerseys because the holes were so large, they wore shirts under them. When we started the girls tennis program the transportation was me and parents. At one meet I had given a student my key to get into my trunk, she locked the key in and we had to borrow rackets until a locksmith could come and open the trunk.

Doug Firebaugh – 1958 Graduate of Freeport High School Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

- FSD#145 career: 36 years (1963-1999)
- Doug started teaching at FHS in fall of 1963-and introduced the new CHEM STUDY approach to teaching chemistry-Doug...you'll chuckle at the fact that a similar approach is now "en vogue" again in science (Like fashion, all good ideas in education make their way back around into the classroom again!)
- He became co-advisor of JETS (Junior Engineering Technical Society) which was our local science club affiliated with the National Organization. The club was in the process of grinding a 12 inch telescope mirror and raising money to build an observatory which we opened in 1967.
- Introduced and taught an Advanced Chem class in 1966
- Introduced and taught an Astronomy class in 1967
- Received "Outstanding Young Educator" award from Jaycees in 1967.
- Received "Outstanding High School Chemistry Teacher" award from the Rock River Section of the American Chemical Society in 1980.
- Recognized by the National JETS Organization as JETS Faculty Advisor of the year and our club was honored as the "Best Club In The Nation."
- In 1981, Doug's prominence as a science instructor took him to a National level. He was asked to address the JETS Advisors at the National Assembly in Washington DC.
- Doug was recognized as "Educator of The Year" by Freeport School District in 1988
- And received the "Award of Excellence" by the State Board of Education in 1990
- He felt greatly honored when the former JETS Observatory was renamed the Doug Firebaugh Observatory in the spring of 2014
- As Doug looked back on his teaching career of 36 years, he remarked that he feels so blessed to have worked with so many dedicated teachers and supportive staff. However it was the students that brought him the greatest joy and satisfaction as he followed their progress through his classes and then into fulfilling vocations. Doug believes there is no greater "perk" in teaching than to have former students express their appreciation for what they had learned in your class and how they used it through the years.
- Last year, Freeport High School celebrated its 90th birthday--the historic building was built in 1926! Doug made sure to attend our party and told story after story...but what most memorable was his response to an early career Pretz News article...wow...I had hair back then!
- Doug's old room remains the only science room renovated at FHS. He is a man who made things happen for both Freeport High School and our community.

**Jeff Lamm – 1975 Graduate of Freeport High School
Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award**

- Jeff Lamm is being honored here tonight as a longtime community volunteer and Freeport High School volunteer
- Lincoln-Douglas Kiwanis Member since 1978--Served as president for 3 terms
- Kiwanis Club coordinator to FSD145 for K-Kids, Builders Club and Key Club
- Implemented and served as advisor to Key Club at FHS for 33 years
- Coordinated Activities/Fundraising efforts between Kiwanis and school sponsored K-12 Programs to benefit children worldwide
- Coached Jr. Tackle
- Coached Little League
- Past Board of Directors for Boys and Girls Club
- Presented with the Amador medallion Award by Kiwanis in August of 2017 for excellence in community work as a Kiwanian for 35 years
- Honored with the George F. Hixson Fellow Award
- 40 year career and community commitment running family business--Freeport Glass
- Lives Pay It Forward. Providing trophies at little cost to student activities, volunteering for events, and mentoring students...
- Jeff continues to help to shape the future of Freeport by Paying if Forward with our youth.

George Dewey Lipscomb--1917 Graduate of Freeport High School Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award

- George Dewey Lipscomb made history in Freeport when in 1917 he became the first Black student to graduate Freeport High School
- Known for his ability to speak and write well, George won the state oratorical championship while in high school
- After graduation, he attended Northwestern University
- He continued his path to become a College Professor at Wiley College in West Virginia and then later was a professor at Howard University
- As an accomplished author, George is credited with co-writing a noted biography of George Washington Carver with Shirley Graham DuBois, another noted Black author.
- To put his accomplishments in perspective, let us reflect for a moment on the historical context in which George lived as a young black man 100 years ago.
- At this time, the census estimates approximately 10% of our country was black. When the U.S. enters World War I, approximately 370,000 of the enlisted troops are black and more than 1000 are in positions of leadership, commanding troops.
- However, riots and lynchings were not uncommon. In 1917 the NAACP organized a silent march in which 10,000 black americans participate. In 1919, the race riots and lynchings by the KKK (many of soldiers returning home from the war) are so egregious, the summer of 1919 is coined the “Red Summer of 1919” by poet James Weldon Johnson
- Economic and farming conditions in the South as well as a need to replace the cheap labor of the european immigrants who stopped coming to the US during the war, allowed many blacks to be recruited from the South to the North during the decade of the 1910s-20s, mostly to work in manufacturing related jobs.
- However, blacks were far more likely to be under-represented in schools, barred from accessing higher studies, and discouraged from taking work typically completed by a Caucasian man.
- Despite these political and social issues of the time, George not only completed his high school, but also college degree. He took up teaching to continue to pay it forward and educate future students.

**Russell Slifer--1983 Graduate of Freeport High School
Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award**

- Born in Elwood, IN; grew up in Freeport.
- Russ gives all his credit to his wife, Phyllis (Secker) Slifer, a 1985 graduate of Freeport High School, who has supported and encouraged him throughout his career.
- With interests that mainly focused on science and engineering he has fond memories of high school woodshop class with Mr. O'Neill, electronics class with Mr. DeHahn, Physics with Mr. Langdon, and the swim team with coach David Steenrod (Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award winner).
- He was the first in his family to graduate from college, earning a degree in Electrical Engineering from Iowa State University in 1988.
- After college, Russ returned to Freeport as a design engineer for Honeywell - Micro Switch where he designed automotive sensors.
- He is the inventor of two patents in video game and database technologies.
- Russ earned his law degree from Northern Illinois University in 1994 where he was a member of the NIU Law review.
- He practiced patent law in Minneapolis, MN for 8 years before moving to Boise, ID where he became the Chief Patent Counsel for Micron Technology, a fortune 150 semiconductor manufacture.
- Deciding to serve our country, he left Micron Technology and became the first Regional Director of United States Patent and Trademark office in Denver, CO. In this role, Russ was the USPTO's primary liaison with the innovation community in the Rocky Mountain Region.
- Russ was appointed by President Obama to serve as the Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Deputy Director of the United States Patent and Trademark. In this position he managed day-to-day operation of the 13,000-employee agency.
- He has testified before Congress and the Federal Trade Commission on Intellectual Property issues and is a nationally recognized leader in patent law. Russ has served as President of the Association of Corporate Patent Counsel and currently serves on the Board of Directors of the National Inventors Hall of Fame.
- In his own words: "I have had many mentors help me in my life and I am very grateful to Lyle King, Lynn Wilson and a great friend, Duane "Chad" Tempel, who were instrumental in setting me on the right path in high school."

**Jean Farrar--1945 Graduate of Freeport High School
Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award**

- Jean Farrar was born May 21, 1927 in Chicago, Illinois.
- Jean was raised in Freeport and educated in Freeport schools, graduating with the class of 1945.
- She raised four successful children, Floyd, Phil, Tanya, and Michael.
- She began her work with children and education as the secretary for Project Head Start in 1966. She served in this role for four years. Eventually, Jean rose to become the Director of the Freeport Head Start Program
- Jean's leadership extended beyond Freeport, as she served with the Illinois Head Start Directors Association in leadership capacities.
- In 1983, leadership of the Martin Luther King Center named Jean Farrar Educator of the Year. Jean also served on the Board of the King Center for 6 years
- Jean was a member of Gamma Taus, a black women's social club which provided meals and clothing to the elderly and the young in the Freeport community
- Jean often sought advice and gave advice for preschool parents and communicated quite often with Geraldine Jones who was the Director for the Amity Daycare Facility.
- Our own school district honored Jean's tireless devotion to the young of community when it named Jones-Farrar elementary school after Geraldine Jones and Jean Farrar, who tirelessly shaped our community's progress toward educating our youngest learners.
- Jean passed away in March 1987. If Jean were with us tonight, she would want us to know how important it is for our community to continue to come together. She was a crusader for children.
- She cared about those less fortunate, but Headstart was about more than just children. It was about families. As a mother, she made sure her own family ate together in the evening and that they prayed together at church.
- Jean knew that family and church made for a better family, better community, better relationships, and a better town.
- While Jean never worked for the school district, many probably thought she did. Her husband was a custodian in the district for 20 years, but Jean was regularly seen as a volunteer parent for classroom parties, helping teachers, and even serving on the PTA Board for Taylor Park Elementary.

**Phil Farrar-- Graduate of Freeport High School”
Robert Johnson Distinguished Alumni Award**

- Phil Farrar is a national award winning broadcast journalist who has interviewed pretty much anyone who has been named a “somebody” in their time.
- Freeport born and raised and attended Taylor Park K-6 where he was named 'Patrol Boy' Of The Year.
- Began broadcasting football games on Freeport Cable In 1973-1974. He broadcast football and basketball games his Junior and Senior years.
- At FHS he played basketball and baseball and was awarded baseball Team’s 'Rock Of The Year Award,'
- As a very, terribly proud Pretzel, Phil served as one of three Commencement Speakers for the Freeport High School Bi-Centennial Class Of 1976 and wore a red, white, and blue tassel instead of the customary orange and black tassel.
- From 1976-1980 Phil attended college and graduated with a communications degree specializing in radio and television broadcasting.
- Covered the arrival by Georgia Governor and Presidential Candidate Jimmy Carter. Youngest reporter on Press Row during Drake Relays In 1978.
- Anchor/Reporter at WREX-TV from 1980-1989. First Interview, Golfer Chi Chi Rodriguez.
- Reported From Dixon, Illinois where Ronald Reagan grew up (He was born in Tampico) And In 1980 was there when he was elected President.
- Interviewed local hostages held in Iran for 444 days. Leland Holland ,from Scales Mound and Kevin Hermanning from Janesville, Wisconsin.
- Interviewed Vice-President George H.W. Bush days before he was elected President.
- He has interviewed Bruce Jenner among other famous celebrities, including when he worked for CBS and NBC in Chicago from 1989-1992, his first interview was Jimmy Stewart.
- Phil has covered every living President and has had one on one interviews with Presidents Carter, Bush #41, Clinton, Bush #43 and has covered Obama and Trump.
- In 2004 Phil was embedded as the only reporter on board for two weeks with the USS Ronald Reagan as the world’s largest aircraft carrier made its way from Virginia to San Diego.
- He has covered four Superbowls, one World Series, and one NBA Playoff Series along with college sports
- He has covered countless murder trials, court cases, military stories, entertainment, investigative and deadly wildfires.
- Phil has volunteered for the D.A.R.E.program and has spent countless hours with children of abused women associated with the YWCA of San Diego.
- He has emceed and given back to journalism associations and scholarships
- Phil is currently anchoring the Weekend Edition at AM 600 KOGO Radio in San Diego. He is also the Senior Correspondent with an emphasis on politics, military and sports.

**David Taylor --- 1962 Graduate of Freeport High School
Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award**

- Dave Taylor, according to his nominator, Gale Otto, was declared by legendary Freeport coach, Ron Norman, as the best basketball player he'd ever coached.
- Dave was known to completely dominate the basketball court
- David was just as dominate in track, holding several records in the hurdles, high jump, and relays. He barely missed an Olympic hurdle team opportunity.
- As a 3 sport athlete, David used his speed as a weapon on the football field as well as an offensive tight end.
- At the time, our high school conference was voted the toughest in the country, with strong competition from athletes across Northern Illinois.
- In college, David continued his dominance, which eventually led to his induction in the Truman State University Hall of Fame in basketball and track.
- As a senior basketball player, he averaged 12.9 point, 12.3 rebounds and was named to the All-MIAA second team.
- In track he earned All-American honors, setting new school and conference records in the high jump.
- He was the recipient of the 1966 Stickler Cup as the outstanding senior athlete.
- Mr. Taylor says the Stickler Cup award, participating in NCAA Division II and Division I track championships and his selection to the Quincy (Ill.) College Christmas Basketball All-Tournament team were the highlights of his college athletic career.
- After graduation in 1967 with a B.S.E. degree he spent two years in the Army and then moved to the Boston area.
- He worked for the city of Watham (Mass.) recreation department and was the department director from 1975-81. He relocated in Maryland and worked for a government recreation program. He also worked as a supervisor of youth programs and conservation projects for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Wildlife Service. (<https://trumanbulldogs.com/hof.aspx?hof=203>)
- Dave wants us all to know how much he values the legacy of the Freeport Pretzels.
- In fact, one highlight story he shared is of a Drake University large scale track meet he participated in while in college. During the event, he received a note from 8 or 9 Freeport High School coaches present at the event. Neither Dave nor the Freeport coaches knew their paths would cross that day, but the Freeport crew went out of their way to send a good luck note, signed by all present, to Dave.
- He still has that note today...it happened to have been written on Frank Burn's blank check.
- After taking 2nd in the meet that day, the coaches and Dave enjoyed a nice reunion at Drake. What still impresses Dave is the effort his high school coaches made that day, just to make him feel special and connected to Freeport.

**Randy Hawley--1966 Graduate of Freeport High School
Preston Pearson Outstanding Athlete/ Interscholastic Individual/Accomplished Team Award**

- High School Football
 - Started on Offense and Defense for 2 Years
 - 2nd Place in Conference Junior Year
 - Captain Senior Year
 - Led Conference in Pass Receptions Senior Year
- Basketball
 - Won Sophomore Conference Championship
 - Two Year Varsity Starter, Captain Senior Year
 - All Conference Honorable Mention Junior Year, All Conference Senior Year
 - Team Records: 26-2 and 20-6.
 - Won Conference Championship Junior Year and 3rd Place Senior Year
- Track and Field
 - 3 Year Varsity Performer
 - Captain Senior Year
 - MVP Senior Year
 - High Point Scorer Junior and Senior Years
 - Broke School Record for Most Points Scored in One Season
 - Broke Conference Record in High Jump – 6’5”
 - Broke School Records in High Jump – 6’5” and 880 Relay
 - Team won the Madison West Indoor Track Meet my Senior year, becoming the 1st Illinois team to ever win the meet.
- College
 - Attended Northwestern University on Track Scholarship
 - Broke School Records in High Jump – 6’10”, the 440 Yd. relay and Mile Medley Relay.
 - Placed 5th in the High Jump at the Big Ten Indoor Championships
 - Placed 2nd in the High Jump at the Big Ten Outdoor Championships
 - Qualified for the NCAA Championships in the High Jump
- Freeport Coaching
 - Head High School Swim Coach 1970-77
 - Prior to 1970 Swim Team had 1 winning season in 25 years
 - Had 4 Consecutive Winning Seasons 1974-77
 - Voted Conference Swim Coach of the Year Twice
 - Swim Team won Conference Championship in 1977
 - First Conference Swim Championship in School History
- Assistant High School Track Coach 1971-74
- Head Jr. High Track Coach 1974-77
- Assistant High School Football Coach 1970-72
 - Won Conference Sophomore Championship 1972
- Distinguished career in education, continuing to pay it forward to educate our future.
- Randy has served as an Asst. Superintendent of schools and Superintendent across the country. Currently he resides in Sedona, Arizona and is retired, but still serving on his local school board.

Arnetta McGee--1948 Freeport Grad, FSD #145 Career: 36 years (1966-2002)
Bill Chance Accomplished Educator/Coach Award

- In the spring of 2018, Arnetta (pronounced Ar-neat-a) recounted her life and work as an educator to Dr. Patty Burke, her nominator. This summer, Arnetta passed away, leaving behind a legacy of educating of Freeport students who loved her. Arnetta McGee BELIEVED in her students everyday.
- And, when her students challenged her, Arnetta sent many a student to the “thinking chair,” for a moment of reflection. That chair helped many Freeport students right their wrongs and reset their day.
- Arnetta was born in Freeport in 1930, the daughter of a railroad worker who came to Freeport from Mississippi and a mother, who with an 8th grade education, was a school teacher in Mississippi.
- As Arnetta grew up in Freeport, she knew she would become a teacher. It was in her blood. She excused herself from lunch periods at FHS to take additional courses in band and orchestra as well as college preparatory courses.
- Arnetta remembered well the numerous times when asked by skeptical staff if she was certain that she was going to college, as the “college track may not be necessary.”
- Her response was that the only thing that was certain was that she was born Black, she was staying Black, and she would die Black AND that she was going to college.
- We are so very glad that Arnetta didn’t listen to others and followed her own dreams.
- Arnetta attended West Virginia State University in the fall of 1948, and did not plan to return to Freeport as only her immediate family lived here. However, after her first two years of college, her mother was ill and required on-going assistance, so Arnetta put aside her college plans and came home to Freeport.
- In 1951 she married Frank McGee and together they had two daughters, Karen and LaFrancine. And even after starting a family and continuing to take care of her parents, Arnetta enrolled at National Louis College in Chicago. She took busses, cars, even freight trains...anything moving to get to classes in Chicago. Arnetta finished her teaching degree.
- In January 1966, Mrs. McGee became the first Black teacher at Harlem Elementary School and just the second Black teacher in the Freeport District. (Mr. Roosevelt Banks, a previous Hall of Fame inductee was the 1st and he is with us tonight!)
- The Superintendent, Dr. Moynihan, told Arnetta that he may not have the power to racially integrate the community, but he had the power to at least racially integrate the schools in the community.
- Mrs. McGee spent 16 years as a first grade teacher at Harlem Elementary, and managed with grace many conversations with parents and students who only saw her skin color, not her teaching.
- After Harlem closed, she spent the last 17 years at Taylor Park, again as a first grade teacher.
- Her students remember learning more than their ABC’s and 123’s. Mrs. McGee taught social skills, responsibility and accountability. Many of her students kept in touch with her years after first grade, as a testament to her ability to mentor students.
- Arnetta McGee touched the lives of more than 1000 students in 36 years in the Freeport School District.
- But, she didn’t stop there. After retiring, Arnetta coordinated volunteers for seven years and served on the District’s Equity Steering Committee since its inception in 1996 up until her passing this summer.
- She taught Sunday School classes and played the piano at St. James, where she was a member for 85 years.
- When asked what drove her to continue to serve her community, Mrs. McGee simply replied that “it is never a privilege to say ‘no’.”

Charles Hilton--1961 Graduate of Freeport High School
Kathy Helm Friend of Freeport High School Award

- If you've ever been to a game at Freeport High School in the last 30 years, you've seen Charles (Charlie) Hilton at the gate. Charlie has been present for nearly every boys' football or basketball game for the last 30 years.
- Rain, snow, sleet and cold as well as unbearable heat have not stopped Charlie from taking a seat near the gate to collect tickets and stamp hands.
- Nearly every time Charlie works, he wears his Vietnam cap. His proud stance, shaking hands and patting guests on the back, speaks volumes not only of his service to our country, but his continued service to Freeport High School.
- Charlie started volunteering because of his love for sports. But he had one condition of working...he makes sure his ticket gate location is in a spot where he can see the game.
- Charlie played football for Freeport, his kids participated in extracurricular activities along with his grandchildren. He understands the difference high school sports make in students' lives.
- Over the years, Charlie has established relationships with all of our guests. Many a time, Charlie continues to take tickets from others while he entertains a conversation with his Freeport Pretzel Athletics friends at the gate. The conversations are always about their families and shared memories. Charlie refers to every friend by name and shakes their hand as they pass the gate.
- Charlie is also not opposed to dressing down a rowdy teenager and putting them in their place. You see, he has this "business" look that is unmistakable and causes teens to get themselves under control quickly.
- At our first home football game this year, Charlie was our Honorary Captain for the night. When the Varsity team was ready to storm the field, Charlie led them out on the field and participated in their game starting huddle.
- He later described the experience as one of the best nights he's ever had at a game.
- Charlie VOLUNTEERED his time at every single game he worked.

**Don and Janey Morse--(Don: 1959 Graduate of Freeport High School
Kathy Helm Friend of Freeport High School Award**

- Both Don and Janey are being inducted due to their legacy in our community, for countless not for profits just like Freeport High School, has been their giving of time, talent, and finances to worthy causes.
- Like many of our honorees this evening, Don had plans after graduating that changed due to his family's needs. Halfway through the University of Illinois, Don's dad passed and Don came home to run the family business.
- Don may not have ever finished his degree, but friends and colleagues describe him as always learning, always reading, and always listening.
- In addition to being considered a friend to many, Don also inadvertently or casually "mentored" or educated countless others on business principals. In a sense, Don was an educator, although he never considered himself that way.
- He was like a small business incubator taking people out to lunch encouraging them and even investing. He started new businesses and always used local services...from cars and trucks to health care and haircuts to legal and accounting and banking.
- With Janey at the financial helm of the Morse companies and Don steering the ship, the duo were a remarkable pair who grew the company into a group of companies under the umbrella of the Morse brand. Today offices exist in Dubuque, Freeport, Beloit, Texas, Las Vegas and Aurora. The company is located here in the former Trustmark building and has grown exponentially and diversified in several related business since its humble beginnings on Chippewa Avenue.
- Don always worked really hard at something new until he was the best at it before he went on to something else. An example was his desire to be the best clay bird shooter from his hip. He became the best around and then moved on to conquer cards, pool, really anything he could make competitive.
- As a team, Don and Janey complimented each other perfectly. Janey added the financial strategies to their shared dreams, and Don made sure to hire employees who would become his friends, and dedicate themselves to growing the company alongside team Morse. Don and Janey were a beautiful partnership.
- Don believed that you always hire someone smarter or more capable in a speciality area than yourself, and then give them opportunities. A successful business also needs that visionary or driving force that sets the ideals on which the company will withstand the test of time --- and Don and Janey certainly did that.
- The accomplishments of the Morse Group are extensive. Honors include, Illinois Family Business of the Year and Chamber Business of the Year, as well as recognition among electrical contractors regionally and nationally.
- However, the extensive history of assisting non profits with generous benevolence is the hallmark Morse legacy.
- Malcolm Eaton always held a special spot in Don's heart and so did Highland Community College. At Freeport High School, in kind donations of electrical work, opportunities for students interested in the electrical field, and donations to countless groups and teams are just some of the generosity received.
- The annual golf tournament held in Don's honor has been able to give about \$30K annually to our community. Malcolm Eaton is one of the larger beneficiaries of his tournament largely due to Don's passion and desire to help those less fortunate, especially those with mental disabilities.
- Don's benevolence in this area began at St. Frances School. Sisters Lucetta and Gabrielle were his heroines and they became great friends. Whatever those amazing kids or facility needed, they contacted Don. When it was hot, we installed fans over their beds; when they needed TV's, he only asked how many ~ the list goes on and every time, Don found a way to help.
- Together Don and Janey were a driving force behind the success of the Morse Group. The business has come a long way since Don Sr. started it in 1944 with \$300 and a bread truck. Their decision to share their success with the Freeport Community is what makes both Don and Janey Friends of Freeport High School. In Don's obituary, there was a quote, "If there is something good going on in this community, the Morse family is usually part of it."