



HOLDREGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

Giving Back to Education

HHS Alumni Recognition Feature!



Dear HHS Alumni and HPS Foundation Supporters,

Holdrege High School is fortunate to have many very successful graduates. We are excited to continue sharing the stories of some of those HHS Alums thanks to the journalistic talents of Kristine (Long) Jacobson, Class of 1990.

Don't forget the Give2Grow Fundraiser tomorrow! Visit the [HPS Foundation Give2Grow](#) page and schedule your donation today! If you are interested in donating toward the Duster Pavilion project, be sure to include a dedication indicating "Duster Pavilion".

We also welcome your suggestions and comments and encourage you to join the Duster Alumni Association (*see form below*).

Sincerely,

*Matt Allmand, Chairman
HPS Foundation Committee*

Richard Carlson - Class of 1974

HHS grad gives back through encore career in teaching

By Kristine Jacobson

Richard Carlson described himself as a 'pain in the butt' in high school.

In Mr. Ed Walker's geography class, Carlson and his classmate, Margaret, called a strike because they didn't want to get out their geography books.

"A lot of teachers would get mad," Carlson said. "Instead, Mr. Walker asked, 'What are your demands?'" That caught Carlson and his friend off guard, but they made up some demands about longer lunch or recess breaks.

"I'll never forget his indulgence," Carlson said. "He was obviously meant to be a teacher because he turned it into a learning experience - what we call a 'teachable moment.' He taught us about strikes because we led him to it."

Despite his 'smarty pants' attitude, Carlson did graduate from HHS in 1974. And, now, after 25 years in the Navy and a successful technology career, it's his turn to teach those 'pain in the butt' kids.

For his 'encore career,' Carlson teaches accounting and computer classes in one of Nebraska toughest high schools - Omaha North. He impacts about 160 students each year. "There's nothing I like better to do than walk into a dark room and turn on the lights, or light the candle," Carlson said of helping kids learn.

Gangs and gun violence are common place at Omaha North. "Losing a couple of 14-15 years olds to gun violence will sober you up pretty quick," he said recalling some of his students who died.

His students refer to him as OG, not for 'old guy' but for 'original gangster.' Or, as Carlson says 'original gangstah.' Carlson is quick to tell his student that although he was naughty in school, he was never in a gang. His pranks and silliness may have involved snakes and mousetraps but never guns and violence. He hopes to have an impact on kids the way his Holdrege teachers did.

After Ed Walker died, Carlson told Walker's wife, "You have no idea what a difference this guy made in my life."

Other teachers and the Holdrege community helped shape Carlson's life as well. "I love music," Carlson said. "That's one thing this town helped me with." Carlson's mother, Lois, 'forced' him to take piano lessons. He loved his band teachers, Norm McIntosh, and Merle Straatman, and his choir teacher Ron Nelson.

Carlson shared his musical talents by playing the piano and organ for the Trinity Evangelical Free church. He played trumpet in band and was among the HHS band students who marched in the Portland Rose Festival 40 years ago. The band won national honors for their performance. "Straatman was so proud of us," he said of his band teacher.

Carlson remembers musicals, community concerts and even a Broadway show in Holdrege during his youth. "We were a musical city," he said.

After high school, Carlson enlisted in the U.S. Navy to help pay for his college. In the Navy, he learned to be a hospital corpsman because he was considering a



Richard and Cheryl Carlson with their children, Trip and Rachel

medical career. He trained and lived at Camp Pendleton in California and enjoyed stitching guys up and playing Frisbee and body surfing in his spare time. He was stationed for a while in Japan, where he did medical checks for incoming corpsman.

After his first four years in the Navy, Carlson returned to Holdrege to decipher his next steps. But, before winter hit, he returned to sunny California and rejoined the Navy, but this time in the Navy reserves. "When you are down to your last \$600, you will do crazy things like rejoin the Navy," he said.

He also landed a job at a stock-market brokerage firm, where he met lots of wealthy people. "I thought, 'why do they have millions of dollars?'" he said. "There was one constant thread. They all had an education."

So, in 1981, he enrolled at San Diego State, originally pursuing a music degree. "I was a music major for the first half of my schooling," Carlson said. "Then I saw all my music teachers getting laid off." So, he switched his major to business, which proved to be wise decision for his financial future.

After graduating in 1986, he reluctantly gave up his job at Color Tile in San Diego and moved to Silicon Valley. He jokes about that now, how different his life would be had he stayed at Color Tile.

In Silicon Valley, he worked for DEC, Digital Equipment Corporation, where he got involved in selling computers just as the computer era began. He also met his wife, Cheryl, at DEC. They married in 1992 at Yosemite National Park.

In the late 1990s, DEC was purchased by Compaq. In 2000, Carlson and his young family, that included a daughter, Rachel, and a son, Trip, decided to move back to Nebraska when there was a job opening at the Compaq office in Omaha. He was glad to be back near home and spend some time with his father, Dick, (a plumber during his career), who died later that year. Compaq was eventually purchased by Hewlett Packard, where Carlson worked until his early retirement in 2007.

After a two-year break from the working world, Carlson decided to earn his teaching certificate from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and begin his 'encore career.' "This teaching gig is for the kids," he said. His own son, Trip, now 17, also attends Omaha North.

"I try to offer an example," Carlson said of his students. "I tell them how I went from a little town in Holdrege to Silicon Valley and I'm doing pretty well for myself."

Carlson is still grateful to Holdrege for instilling in him the love of music. He plays piano, attends concerts, and enjoys music in his spare time. He still enjoys playing practical jokes on his friends and family. It's his way to reach out to others. "It's life," Carlson said, "and I embrace it fully."

About Us

The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.

Holdrege Public Schools Foundation
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