

## **Meritorious Inductee into the Class of 2016**

### **Mr. Joseph “Red” Jones**

Every year for the past twenty years, The Lake-Lehman School District has presented The Joseph “Red” Jones Award for Citizenship to a graduating senior. This award is presented at the graduation ceremony and is special to Lake-Lehman because Joseph “Red” Jones was special to this school district.

“Red” became a member of the Lake-Lehman School Board in 1981 and for 14 years was a passionate advocate for education and the students of the district. With his leadership on the board, great changes took place at Lake-Lehman. Lehman went from being a school in the farming community to a school that could compete with any in the Wyoming Valley academically and athletically.

“Red” was chairman of the Athletic Committee of the board for his entire time on the school board. He was an outstanding athlete during his high school years and a very successful basketball coach in the sixties. At the age of 25, “Red” became the varsity basketball coach at St. Vincent’s High School in Plymouth. He coached for 7 seasons and was the school’s all-time winningest coach with a 112-17 record. His team won four league championships, five Class C titles and four consecutive Sportsmanship Awards presented by the Wyoming Valley Basketball officials. He used that background to help Lake-Lehman expand its sports programs, recruit great coaches, engage more students, and win more championships.

“Red” was twice elected by his peers to serve as board president and twice during that time, lead the efforts to negotiate contracts with the Education Association that were fair and just, and had the long term interests of the students in mind. During this time, graduation rates improved and a greater percentage of students went on to higher education.

“Red” went on to serve the people of Luzerne County as a County Commissioner in 1996 and was instrumental in improving flood protection throughout the Wyoming Valley, expanding Luzerne County Community College and the Wilkes-Barre Scranton International Airport, paving the way for the Arena, creating a county wide 911 emergency response system and boosting key initiatives for economic development.

“Red” was also very well known in Luzerne County as a square-dance caller and some even claimed he was among the best in the state. “Red” first started calling at the age of 13 and has used this talent for over 55 years to benefit countless community organizations, libraries, school groups and booster clubs, church organizations, volunteer fire companies, little leagues and youth clubs, Habitat for Humanity, Valley Santa, Volunteers of America and Irem Temple Shriners, just to name a few.

In addition to helping countless community causes by calling square dances for them. Red has been a weekly volunteer for over 17 years at Mercy Center in Dallas, PA and has volunteered at North Side Forsyth Hospital in Georgia. “Red” is also a person of strong faith and has served as a Eucharistic Minister for the homebound and sick.

“Reds” charitable works are only part of his long history of service to the community. He has served the nation as a Marine in the late 1950s and for most of the 1960’s.

Most recently, “Red” has been inducted into the Luzerne County Sports Hall of Fame.

Reflecting on his days at Lake-Lehman, “Red” stated that he is proud that his time serving on the School Board was not about politics. He stated that during this time, administrators and faculty were supported, and sports teams and the band program got what they needed to be successful. He was all about the education of our students and had great working relationships with school leaders like Jim Nicholas, Jay Zaleskas, Roger Bearde and so many others.

One of the many stories of “Red’s” time serving on the board that highlights and sums up his relationship with students, faculty and administration dealt with the special needs of a student who happened to be the son of a district teacher, Bonnie Turchin. “Little Eddie” needed additional physical activity to help him deal with and maintain the health issues he was facing. A swimming pool was suggested. At the time, “Red” was the sales manager of a swimming pool company and was able to get a pool for the Turchin family. “Red” then rounded up many of the teachers with some construction skills and, at no cost to the Turchins, the pool was installed, much to the delight and enjoyment of Little Eddie.

The Lake-Lehman School District significantly changed during the eighties and early nineties and changed for the better. Joseph “Red” Jones was a key leader in making those changes possible. He served with courage and conviction and is most worthy of induction into the Lake-Lehman School District “Knights of the Round Table”.