

A Farewell to Mark Klein

1,872 weeks. 13,104 days. 314,496 hours. That's how long Mark Klein has been a part of the CR School District. 36 years! Eleven of those years he has served as Superintendent.

Mark began his career at CR in 1979. A quick glance back at 1979 has the debut of the Sony Walkman, Kramer vs. Kramer won the Oscar for Best Film and The Bee Gees, Rod Stewart, Gloria Gaynor and Donna Summer dominated the Billboard charts. Mark taught 4th, 5th and 6th grade at Churchville Elementary and Richboro Elementary schools. After 4 years of attending classes 3-4 nights a week, while teaching, he received his law degree from Rutgers University. Also while teaching, he spent two summers as a Conflict Counselor for juveniles. He left teaching for a year and worked as a clerk for Judge Isaac Garb. But the pull of the classroom was too strong and Mark returned to teaching in CR. After ten years in front of students, he moved into the Principal's office at Newtown Elementary in 1995. In 1999 Mark went to Holland Elementary as Principal. And in 2004, he was chosen to lead CR as Superintendent.

What one notices right away about Mark is that he seems to know everyone. This is no easy feat in a district as large as CR. From teachers to students to parents to community members, he greets most by name. Forging these relationships for the past 36 years has been important to him. He has spent many hours walking hallways and meeting people throughout the district. You could find Mark playing in a March Madness basketball game or reading to young students at one of the elementary schools or running in Tyler State Park or walking down State Street at lunch time. Some of his happiest and most memorable moments have occurred when he was simply interacting with the school community.

According to Mark, 90% of his time as Superintendent has been positive. His days as Superintendent have been filled attending many meetings and some of these meetings involved conflict – which he doesn't mind. Change has probably been the most difficult aspect of his position as it is often met with resistance, even when the change is for the betterment of all stakeholders in the district. But Mark knew that instituting change takes time. Patience and communication are two extremely important factors with any alteration to curriculum, budget, staffing... Mark believes that when handled correctly there is a smooth transition.

After he retires from CR, Mark is looking forward to spending more time with his family. His two daughters have gone on to become teachers and his son is in his first year of residency at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. But Mark is not ready to sit at home and drive his wife, Diane, crazy. He intends to continue in the classroom as an adjunct professor at Lehigh University. He will also make sure he has time to run and play tennis. And Diane has a "To Do" list for him that stretches back 25 years!

As for the future of CR, Mark would like the district to keep going strong and not to rest on its laurels. CR should always be striving to become better. The district does many things right, so according to Mark, "you don't have to abandon what's tried and true." He'd also like to see innovators have a voice as CR forges ahead in the areas of technology and virtual education. The biggest problem currently facing not only CR but all school districts is the uncertainty of financing for public education. Hopefully some of this can be resolved with the State Legislature implementing a better state funding formula.

When asked what advice he would like to pass on to his successor, Mark had six simple words, "Be visible and be out there!" Building relationships is probably the most important thing his successor could do. Being surrounded by strong, capable and dedicated individuals will help ease the transition for the new Superintendent. Having a good alarm clock and reliable car will also help his successor on those cold winter mornings when roads have to be assessed to determine a delay or closing!

As he prepares to leave CR, which has been such a huge part of his life, Mark can hold his head high knowing that, in his words, "I'm leaving the district a little bit better than I found it." His impact on CR students and teachers, as well as parents and the community, will have long lasting effects. Indeed, we are all better off having had the opportunity to learn from and work with Mark (Olaf) Klein!

Citizens would like to thank Mark for taking the time to sit down and talk with us.