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Richard J. Dorsey 1922-2008
Part educator, part confidant
By Joan Giangrass Kates

Special to the Tribune

November 15, 2008

As a longtime educator at West Aurora High School, Richard J. Dorsey seemed to bring out the best in his students. Described as a great listener, he was a confidant to those searching for guidance or sometimes just a pat on the back.

"One student of his struggled with the whole idea of going to college, because what he really wanted was to attend a trade school," said Fran Dorsey, his wife of 59 years. "Dick told him to follow his heart. He said, 'We'll always need people who can fix things.' "

As a varsity basketball coach during the 1950s, Mr. Dorsey's team twice was in contention for a state championship, finishing fourth in 1958 and second the following year.

"He was a master at assessing individual potential," said Neal Ormond, a former student and basketball player who graduated from West Aurora in 1959. "He saw more potential in us than we saw in ourselves."

Mr. Dorsey, 86, who was principal at West Aurora in the early 1980s, died of cancer Tuesday, Nov. 11, in his Aurora home.

Born in Elgin, Mr. Dorsey graduated from Elgin High School in 1941. He attended Illinois State University for about a year before enlisting in the Army Air Forces and was an athletic training instructor at a Florida base from 1943-46.

Following his military discharge, Mr. Dorsey resumed his studies at Illinois State and graduated in 1948 with a bachelor's degree in physical education. He received a master's degree in educational administration from the University of Illinois in 1951.

Early in his career, Mr. Dorsey taught at high schools in Serena, near Ottawa, and Downstate Paris. In 1953, he joined the staff at West Aurora, where he coached basketball and was a physical education and biology teacher before becoming a guidance counselor and then assistant principal.

Mr. Dorsey later was principal at West Aurora for a few years before retiring in 1983.

"He had a big influence on so many of us and was an inspiration to all," Ormond said.

Other survivors include a son, David; a daughter, Karen Johnson; two grandsons; and three great-granddaughters.

A memorial service will be held at 1:30 p.m. Saturday in St. Olaf Lutheran Church, 1233 Douglas Rd., Montgomery.