



BY MARILYN THOMAS
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Retiring District 233 Superintendent Dr. Von Mansfield wants his legacy to be that Homewood-Flossmoor High School is better now than it was when he arrived in 2001 to serve as principal.

On June 30, Mansfield is wrapping up 21 years of service to the district: seven as principal and 14 as superintendent. He will hand out H-F diplomas one last time at graduation on May 29, but he will never stop being an H-F Vikings supporter.

Walking away from 999 Kedzie Avenue in Flossmoor one last time is something he's ready for.

"I think it will be some time before I realize what's happened. I think it'll be a delayed reaction for me because I've done (this job) for so long," he said.

"I've enjoyed what I've done. I think finishing at this point is good for my family and a good stopping point for me. I believe the school's in good stead, so again I'm hoping I'm leaving it as good or better than when I came, and I think now may be the time for that to happen," Mansfield said.

There are so many highlights to look back on. Display cabinets are filled with trophies representing the joy of winning with numerous sports and academic teams; the field house and Performing Arts Center, built under his leadership, are making tremendous differences in the lives of students; the outstanding academic rigors keep Homewood-Flossmoor High School among the best high schools in the state; his time on various state and national boards and organizations helped raise the profile of H-F.

"Something I'm most proud of is we can address the needs of all our students," he said, pointing to

the school's ability to serve students across the spectrum, whether that may be special education services or the top-ranked International Baccalaureate program. H-F has an outstanding staff that can meet students' needs throughout their four years, he said, and outside of the classroom, H-F offers dozens of sports and after-school clubs and activities.

"It's important to provide appropriate curriculum and puts forth what we are to accomplish," he said. "You have to continue to be flexible and change with the times and the needs, and also (educational) requirements and be flexible enough to match those challenges to change to make sure people can do their very best in teaching and learning."

Becoming a principal

Mansfield was on the University of Wisconsin football team when he got drafted after his junior year into the NFL, playing for the Philadelphia Eagles and the Green Bay Packers. Later, he played in the United States Football League. In the off-season he returned to UW to complete his bachelor's degree.

He started his career in education as a science teacher in the Milwaukee school system. After three years, he returned to UW for a master's degree and was a graduate assistant coach. A requirement for the degree was completing a practicum in a high school setting. That brought him to Park Forest and Rich East High School. He was offered a job in the guidance office, which he accepted. He then served as dean of students.

Mansfield moved to Rich Central working in the guidance office before becoming assistant principal in 1994 and principal in 1995. He completed a master's degree in school administration at Governors

State University and a doctorate in education from Loyola University-Chicago in 2000.

He knew the H-F principal's job was open. He was encouraged to apply for the position by former Rich Central colleague Tony Moriarty, who was stepping down as H-F principal.

Mansfield served in that role from 2001 until being named superintendent in 2008.

Taking the D233 reins

Mansfield followed Dr. Laura Murray as superintendent. Having been principal for years, he had the background and knowledge of the school's structure that helped him master the job.

"I came here as principal kind of cold," he remembers, but having been at H-F was a positive when the board was looking for a new superintendent.

Mansfield once compared being superintendent of a district with 3,000 students to being a business CEO. With nearly 300 employees, H-F is one of the largest employers in the area. The district has a budget of approximately \$60 million and a campus that covers 95 acres with two major buildings, sports fields, and a bio pond.

But unlike most businesses, the H-F commodity is educating students for their life ahead.

"I think when you talk about a product, it's educated students for the next opportunity, whether that's the business world or higher education or a trade for the next step in their lives," he said. "(It's) a framework at times just to acknowledge how important the work is that we do. Heaven forbid that we go out of business."

And like every good CEO, Mansfield doesn't keep track of his hours on the job.