

Honoree Worked Alongside Mid-Del Legends Rose & Sutton

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(Midwest City, OK - April 26, 2014) — During its 50th reunion, the Class of 1964 is extending special recognition to Shirley Shipley Nicholson (Class of 1953), first and only curator of the Midwest City High School Museum since 2001.

Mrs. Nicholson's professional and volunteer association with MCHS covers 60 of the school's 70 years!

This includes years in office administration for J.E. Sutton, the first principal (later district superintendent) and Oscar Rose, Mid-Del's first superintendent.

These dynamic men prepared MCHS to greet the first class of post-World War II "baby boomers" in ways the '64 alumni may not have grasped at the time, but will be laid out in the following pages for enhanced appreciation 50 years later.

In summary, through 20 previous classes, Rose and Sutton had built, from the ground up, the third largest school in the state. There was financial genius at work, funding excellent facilities and a competitive pay schedule that attracted highly competent faculty.

Nicholson is an eyewitness to these leaders' accomplishments and a contributor to their success.

After 40 years with the school system, she retired in 1995 from records management responsibility for Mid-Del attendance, personnel, and federal Impact Aid.

After consulting with the district on attendance projects until 1999, she turned her talents toward starting the Midwest City High School Museum, serving continuously on the original and sustaining organizing committees.

She and her husband, Paul, a retired CPA, who lent financial and fundraising expertise to the museum then and now, are parents of three more Bombers: Lisa Nicholson (Class of 1982), Scott Nicholson (Class of 1987), and the late Todd Nicholson (Class of 1991).

The Nicholsons will be guests of the '64 alumni at a reunion buffet at 6:30 p.m., May 3 at the Reed Conference Center in Midwest City.

And, the Reunion Committee is spreading the word to other alumni classes that Nicholson, 78, would like to identify now someone really interested in MCHS to succeed her as volunteer curator.

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Oscar V. Rose shakes hands with President Lyndon B. Johnson at the White House in Washington, D.C. in 1965, following the signing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Rose's earlier initiative, federal Impact Aid, begun in 1950, influenced Johnson toward the broader use of federal grants for the purpose of creating equal opportunity for students to obtain a quality public education. Both Impact Aid and ESEA continue today, the latter now known as, "No Child Left Behind."

Shirley Shipley (Nicholson) graduated from MCHS in 1953 at age 17 and joined the staff of the high school office.

She already had three years of part-time secretarial experience, having worked in the office (receiving business credits) while still a student. She was an excellent typist and knew shorthand.

Nicholson intended to work just one year, then go to college.

“I had received a partial scholarship from OBU. Mr. Sutton (MCHS principal until 1962) found out about it, and he suggested that I work a year to save money before starting college. After that year was up, I never left. I knew I was in the right place,” she said.

Another addition to the MCHS staff in 1953 was a young physical education teacher and football coach from Chickasha named Jim Darnell.

In 1960, a cousin from Frederick introduced Shirley to a friend, Paul Nicholson. They married, made their home in Midwest City, and Paul, the former Frederick Bomber, shifted allegiances. “He’s become every bit as much a Midwest City Bomber as I am,” Shirley said.

At work, Shirley typed scouting reports for coaches, certified players for eligibility, sold football tickets, measured seniors for caps and gowns, and took lunch money in the cafeteria.

“I did a little of everything except secretarial work,” she said, laughing. “I was prepared to take dictation, but Mr. Sutton and Mr. Burris (vice-principal) wrote drafts.”

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Pivotaly, Mrs. Nicholson developed the attendance reports on students. This brought her into contact with Mid-Del Superintendent Oscar V. Rose.

“He liked

the way I had done the attendance reports for the high school, and asked me to come over to the administration office and help out when they were compiling reports from all the other schools for the auditor,” Nicholson said.

Attendance (and demographic) records were central to establishing eligibility for certain types of public funding.

Midwest City benefited greatly from federal Impact Aid, a funding niche that Rose pioneered and that carried him to national and state prominence as “the school man who knew everything there was to know in school finance,” wrote the *Daily Oklahoman* the day following Rose’s sudden death in office in January 1969.

The Midwest City School district had gotten under way in 1943 with 104 students. By the end of the decade, after the anticipated influx of federal workers to Tinker Field, enrollment had ballooned to more than 2,500 students, making the home of the Bombers, after only seven years, the fifth largest district in the state.

Rose sought and received support from the 1941 Defense Public Works Law (Lanham Act) that issued grants for water, sewer, housing, childcare, and schools in communities affected by the growth of the war industry.

Federal funds of \$314,000 purchased the hutment buildings in which the district started in 1943 (now the site of Jarman Middle School) and built the first permanent building on the same site in 1944 (a K-12 school and child care center).



Mr. Rose (left) and Mr. Sutton (right) together launched MCHS. The original site for graduating classes 1944-1955 was at the present location of Jarman Middle School, on MacArthur Dr. Through shared industry, financial acumen, and love for school and community, they built the strong MCHS that would greet the baby boomers of the Class of 1964. By then MCHS was the third largest school in the state and had excellent facilities and a highly competent faculty. The financial health and competitive pay schedule attracted quality teachers.

Grants continued until after World War II, and this K-12 school would grow and divide to comprise the district of elementary, junior high, and high schools of Midwest City and Del City.

In 2014 Mid-Del consists of 26 schools plus an alternative academy and a technology center, with a combined enrollment of 14,000 students. Tinker Air Force Base is still the largest employer in the city and state, with 27,000 military and civilian employees. The base owns 4,000 acres.

By the time the Lanham Act expired in 1950, the federal government employed 70% of the workers in the Midwest City School district.

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Rose realized that, though the local community supported school funding from property taxes to the hilt, neither state nor local funds would keep up with the demands placed on a school serving so many families who were employed at a non-taxable federal property, Tinker Field.

About 600 of the nation's 80,000 districts faced a similar situation of being overburdened with enrollments stemming from defense and other federal activities.

The military base was prone to depleting enrollment as well, as personnel and their families transferred frequently.

Rose created an unofficial

organization of superintendents from federally impacted areas.

What was needed was federal funding to replace the ad valorem taxes that were lost when public property is removed from the state tax rolls.

Working with Oklahoma's powerful Congressional delegation, he was able to gain passage of bills known as "Impact Aid." Aid went for school construction (P.L. 815) and for maintenance and operations (P.L. 874).

The school district built new schools in the 1950s and 1960s and named them after Senators Mike Monroney and Robert S. Kerr; and Representatives

Carl Albert, John Jarman, and Tom Steed.

The respect was mutual. At Rose's death, House Speaker Albert remarked, "No single person has done as much to make the case for children living in federally impacted areas as Oscar Rose."

At its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, Mid-Del district collected upwards of \$2 million in Impact Aid every year.

These totals diminished over time as the funding formula changed and the number of eligible categories (Indian lands were added in 1953 and now receive most support) increased.

In the mid-1980s, the total was \$800,000 a year. By 2013, Mid-Del's share was down to



Photo in the MCHS Museum of the first graduating class, 1944. Top row shows Mr. J.E. Sutton, principal, left; Mr. Oscar V. Rose, superintendent, right; and faculty sponsor for the class, Mrs. Ruth Aylor, center. Mrs. Aylor (Sparks) passed away in December 9, 2013, the last surviving member of the original faculty. Her sons are Gary Aylor (Class of 1965) and Lynn Aylor (Class of 1966).



School secretaries in 1964: (l) Dorothy Green, Peggy Criswell, Bobbie Gonzalez, Mary Glasgow, and Shirley Nicholson. Mrs. Criswell later moved to Carl Albert High School. She, Green, Glasgow, and Nicholson all served the Mid-Del system until retirement.

\$500,000.

For an *Oklahoman* article in 1986, Dr. Vernon McAllister, who had been an assistant superintendent for many years, described how Impact Aid worked:

“A” aid is based on the number of children whose parents are in military service and live on a military base.

“B” aid is based on the number of children of military parents who reside off-base and for children of civilian parents employed by the federal government at military or other federal installations.

“The ‘A’ aid compensates the district for both commercial and residential ad valorem taxes lost, while the ‘B’ compensates only for the equivalent commercial ad valorem taxes lost,” McAllister said.

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The Impact Aid laws, adopted in 1950, were set to expire four years later, but Rose worked relentlessly to make sure they continued each year after that.

In their book chapter on Impact Aid in *Conservatism and American Political Development* (2009),

Professors Brian J. Glenn and Steven M. Teles rave about Rose’s effectiveness.

Rose “was keen on any amendment that would increase the number of legislators with a stake in the program.”

“Tactful, precise and exceptionally well-informed about ‘his’ program, Rose’s real power resided in the close ties that he developed with congressional staffers on the authorization committees, and with the mid-level bureaucrats who administered the program at HEW (Department of Health, Education and Welfare). Also, he worked hard to develop a good relationship with the members and staff of the House appropriations subcommittee whose deliberations played the biggest part in determining impact aid funding levels,” they wrote.

By 1960, thanks to Rose’s leadership, Impact Aid was going to 4,000 districts educating one-third of the nation’s public school children.

Nicholson’s meticulous recordkeeping was scrutinized periodically by federal auditors to make sure Mid-Del attendance figures accurately reflected the number of children in



Midwest City High School front entrance at 213 Elm St. in 1968. This area is now the Midwest City High School Museum. The high school was remodeled in the early 1980s and began fronting Maple Dr.

various categories of eligibility.

Impact Aid followed from the results.

“The auditors were very thorough. They checked every kid just about,” Nicholson said.

“Of all Impact Aid schools, the auditors were in awe of Mr. Rose. They told me they all wanted to come to Midwest City and see the grandfather of Impact Aid.”

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More than just “federal payments in lieu of taxes” to communities whose tax base had been diluted by the presence of federal installations, Impact Aid had morphed into a type of general federal aid to education. This was a concept rejected by previous Congresses, the Impact Aid historians noted.

Nevertheless, President Lyndon Johnson, they continued, successfully used Rose’s Impact Aid “reform” idea of awarding federal grants for the purpose of equalizing educational opportunity to win adoption of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA).

This federal Act extensively funds public education. It has been reformed and reauthorized by Congress every five years and in its latest incarnation is known as “No Child Left Behind.”

The 1968 *Bomber* yearbook, recapping the first 25 years of school history, includes a picture of Mr. Rose shaking hands with President Johnson in the Oval Office following the signing ceremony for ESEA.

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After his death a year later, Rose’s colleagues talked to reporters about his dedication to education and his incredible foresight.

“He made things come true,” said Dr. Herschel Melton, director of special services.

In 1943, Rose knew, better even than Midwest City founder W.P. Bill Atkinson, what would happen growth-wise on the former wheat fields bracketed by



Oscar V. Rose, school superintendent, 1943-1969. Mr. Rose gave his all to MCHS and similarly situated schools in federally impacted areas of the nation. He died in 1969 on a trip to Washington, D.C., pursuing the best interests of students and communities that needed federal Impact Aid funds to replace state and local taxes lost when federal installations (such as Tinker AFB) were removed from the tax rolls. This photo is from the 1965 *Bomber* yearbook.

10th St. and 29th St. north and south, and by Sooner Rd. and Douglas Blvd., west to east, and he was determined, even before there was a town, to be chosen to run its school system.

According to Sutton, Rose, who was at the time superintendent of schools at Bearden, “made a visit to Midwest City early in 1943 and solicited the help of Mr. Atkinson in starting the Midwest City school system and also his help in securing the job as superintendent of schools.

“Mr. Atkinson was not particularly interested and he told Mr. Rose that his visit was premature and to come back in a year or two and see what had developed by then.

“Well, Mr. Rose left but he had no plans to wait a year or two.

He was back in a few months with some facts and figures. This was a quality of Mr. Rose which made him famous throughout the nation. Mr. Atkinson was impressed and he told Mr. Rose to see the Board of Education at the Sooner School District, the district in which Midwest City was being developed.

“He also added that he was too busy building a city and that if Mr. Rose got the job, would he please not bother him anymore about the school system.”

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The Sooner Board of Education elected Mr. Rose superintendent in April 1943, and also hired his wife, Virginia, to be the new Sooner Elementary principal.

Mrs. Rose was every bit the schools person her husband was. She ably led Sooner Elementary as principal until her retirement. The school was renamed Sooner-Rose in her honor.

They had a son, Dayton, and two daughters, Anne Elizabeth, and Jo Helen. The girls graduated from Midwest City High School, and Jo Helen (Webber) taught at MCHS.

Sooner School (1st thru 8th grade) was at the corner of Sooner Road and 15th St. and drew students from an area of nine square miles.

The Midwest City school district would develop from there, allowing Sooner graduates, as well as those at Soldier Creek, another country school at 15th St. and Douglas Blvd., to transfer to the new K-12 school on MacArthur St. for high school in Midwest City, instead of having to drive to Capitol Hill as before.

Bertha Looper, Mildred Webb, and Florence Jenkins were teachers in those country schools who later joined the faculty of MCHS.

On May 3, the Saturday of the Class of 1964 reunion, there will be a "farewell open house" at Sooner-Rose, as well as at Soldier Creek, Traub, and Eastside at their respective locations.

All four older elementary schools are closing their doors at the end of the school year.

Class of 1964 alumnus Tom Wilder contacted the principals and they agreed to extend the open house tour until 1 p.m. to accommodate reunion attendees, whose morning is filled with activities at MCHS.

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But the Rose name will continue to have prominence in the vicinity of Sooner-Rose Elementary. Across the street south is Rose State College.

Oscar Rose, according to the *Oklahoman*, had the dream of starting a junior college in Midwest City, lobbied the proper politicians, and encouraged and guided those who wrote the legislation.

When the college looked for land on which to build the school, Rose already had it ready for option, the newspaper said.

The municipal junior college opened in September 1970 and was named Oscar Rose Junior College in memory of Mr. Rose.

In 1983, the school passed from municipal to state institution, becoming Rose State College and

acquiring \$21 million more per year in state funding.

This was due largely to legislative work by Senator James Howell of Midwest City, who served as chair of the Senate Education Committee from 1974-1986.

Howell is currently a member of the Mid-Del Board of Education. He was a Rose State College Regent from 2004-2011.

He formerly taught speech and coached at Monroney Junior High, and, after becoming a "country lawyer" in 1963, served for the next 22 years as Board attorney for Independent School District 52, or the schools of Midwest City-Del City.

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Mr. Rose impressed everyone with his constant dedication, his penchant for analysis, his dizzying pace, his endless work, and long hours.

He expected those around him to be prepared and well reasoned when seeking his time for their cause.

But, as Nicholson learned early, the gravel-voiced Rose had a soft side.

"When I was still in high school, I was called

over to the administration building one day to run the switchboard. It was a plug-in type. The secretaries pointed out Mr. Rose's line and told me, 'What ever you do, Shirley, don't unplug Mr. Rose's line. He could be talking to Washington.'

"I sat down and the switchboard got busy and before I knew it, I had unplugged Mr. Rose's line. I heard him coming down the hall and I thought, 'I am dead right here and right now.'

"But as soon as he saw it was a student, his attitude changed. He pointed out which one was his phone line and said to be careful not to disconnect him. He was very gentle about it. I realized then he was not all bark," Nicholson said.

"Some didn't realize



Virginia and Oscar V. Rose receive a standing ovation on October 18, 1967, "Appreciation Day," on the 25th anniversary of Midwest City. They were the first two people hired to start the Midwest City school system in 1943. Today, the Mid-Del Schools central administration office, located south of the high school on 15th St., is named in their memory, "Oscar V. and Virginia Rose Administration Center."

that. The principals were afraid of being caught out by Mr. Rose. They used to send their secretaries to pick up the mail.”

On another occasion, she recalled, a maintenance worker came to Mr. Rose’s office to ask for a pay advance. Rose explained that policy prohibited advances, but as the worker got up to leave, asked what the problem was and how much he needed.

“Mr. Rose listened and then opened his personal checkbook and took care of the need,” Nicholson said.

One of the big projects after Nicholson went to work fulltime involved MCHS qualifying for North Central accreditation.

“We had to put together a book. I typed it, and we proofread it numerous times before sending it to Mr. Rose for his signature. He noticed right away that the title sheet had a misspelled word – superintendent!”

In those days, the school offices were open Saturdays until noon. Nicholson and her counterpart, Dorothy Green, reported for work to assist the principals, same as on weekdays.

“After a while, Mr. Sutton would let me and Dorothy rotate. When Mr. Rose found out, he stopped it. He wanted everyone there.”

One Saturday, Rose dropped by and found only Nicholson and Green at the office.

“He threw a fit when the men got back. He didn’t want women in the school alone. He was very concerned about them being in a big place by themselves. We hadn’t thought about that. We already spent more time at school than we did at home. But he was very adamant,” Nicholson said.

About her work environment, she added, “It was an experience I would never trade for. You worked with kind men, gentlemen, and didn’t worry about who you worked for. It was all nice men and women.”

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Nicholson talked about the enjoyable personal relationship she and her family developed with the family of Carol and Lewis “Babe” Eubanks,

Mid-Del superintendent from 1975-1987. Eubanks had previously taught and coached at MCHS, starting in 1955, served for a time as assistant principal, and administered the technology center later named in his honor.

“He was one of the nicest men you could ask for, humble, he had his PhD but didn’t want anyone to ever call him Dr. Eubanks.”

Their children were of similar ages and Nicholson occasionally drove the Eubanks twins, Carolyn and Meredith (both MCHS grads), to appointments after school when work at the office bogged down their father.

Young Lisa Nicholson didn’t seem to realize that superintendent Eubanks was more than a family friend. “She was looking at her junior high yearbook one day and asked, ‘How did Babe Eubanks’ picture get in my yearbook?’”

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Midwest City held “Appreciation Day” for Rose on October 28, 1967, with a giant parade through the downtown of “America’s Model City” and a dinner at Rose Field, home of the football Bombers.

Atkinson and members of Congress attended. House Speaker Carl Albert delivered the keynote address.

During the dinner, Rose announced that the new MCHS fieldhouse under construction would be named for J.E. Sutton, his right hand man since 1943 and currently deputy superintendent.

A picture of the moment, reprinted in the yearbook, shows Sutton’s face clouding with emotion.

What a great day for Midwest City and Mid-Del district, as they celebrated their 25th anniversaries together!

Mr. Rose, age 69, died of a heart attack on January 29, 1969, in Washington D.C. He had been attending a national conference of school superintendents from federally impacted schools.

It was his group, the unofficial



Downtown shopping center of Midwest City on the city’s 25th anniversary in 1967.

band Rose had formed 20 years earlier to fight for federal school aid in areas dominated by government installations.

Mid-Del Schools honored the Rose family in memoriam in the 2000s by renaming its central headquarters on 15th Street, just south of J.E. Sutton Fieldhouse, "Oscar V. and Virginia Rose Administration Center."

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The Mid-Del School Board quickly elected James (Jay) Edgar Sutton, Jr., to succeed Mr. Rose as the second superintendent, and he served from 1969 to 1975.

What Rose was to facts and figures, Sutton was to building a cooperative spirit among administrators, faculty, staff, students, and parents, and telling over and over again what he termed "the great history" of the Midwest City schools.

Shirley Nicholson typed the speeches while on Sutton's staff.

At the MCHS Museum, she hands a sheaf of speeches to any visitor who seriously inquires about MCHS and its past. Some of the speeches are annotated with Sutton's penciled notes.

The earliest speech is dated 1972. It was delivered to teacher orientation. The last is dated September 4, 1993. It was delivered to the Alumni Association on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Midwest City High School.

It begins humorously, "I want to assure you that this is the last time that I will be sharing the history of the Midwest City Schools with you graduates of MCHS."

He laughs at himself some more by revealing how, as a young man of 25 in 1944, he fell for a practical joke by the older Mr. Rose and the school custodian Oscar Bean during a handyman project at the school. The two had sent Sutton on a wild goose chase, including stops at the lumber yard and city hall,



Mrs. Shirley Nicholson in March 2014. She is the first and only curator of the Midwest City High School Museum, Inc., since 2001. Her knowledge of MCHS history is unmatched. She has been affiliated with the school professionally or voluntarily since 1953, a period that covers 60 of the school's 70 years!

for illusory "sky hooks."

He goes on to tell how Tinker Field began in 1941, how Atkinson bought 168 acres of land across the street "to build a city with aviation as its theme," how Rose talked his way into starting a high school and how he recruited Sutton and his wife Irene (a second grade teacher) to move to Midwest City in 1943 and join Rose in the endeavor.

The speech covers the hardship imposed by wartime rationing on the construction of a new school, how a polio epidemic delayed the start just long enough for them to bring in temporary buildings to get underway, how they eventually enrolled 1,000 children the first year, and how for the next 25 years, "the annual growth in this school system was larger than 80% of the school districts in Oklahoma. In the early 1970s, the enrollment exceeded 21,000 students."

Sutton remarks about how George Epperly purchased the land to start Del City in 1946, naming it for his daughter, Delaphene; how the two towns banded together as one mighty school district, "conquering together the problems of housing and financing so great in magnitude at the start."

The speech moves on to the fires that destroyed the original four-room Sooner School (1954); the original Jarman Junior High (1965); the original Del City Elementary (1978); and the closure of Glenwood School and 800 surrounding homes in 1973 to make a green belt for flights in and out of Tinker Field.

All of the speeches evoke enthusiasm, pride, and enjoyment in being affiliated with Midwest City High School.

Mr. Sutton was, his eulogist wrote, "known as a person who loved people."

Retired Del City principal Bob O'Hern said Sutton was so easy-going that when he chewed someone out it "sounded like a compliment."

In 1982, Sutton delivered his talk to a P-TA meeting. He supplemented his remarks with 35 mm

slides of early day Midwest City and the other places and events he describes. He recorded the presentation.

During the Oklahoma Centennial, Bill Sutton, an MCHS graduate, developed a video from the 1982 presentation and posted it in 2008 to “Celebrate Oklahoma Voices” an oral history of the state. The link to the video is shown below.

<http://celebrateoklahoma.ning.com/video/history-of-middel-schools>

The link also appears on the Class of 1964 website, under “History of Mid-Del Schools.”

http://www.classreport.org/usa/ok/midwest_city/mchs/1964/

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Sutton retired in 1975, becoming the district’s superintendent emeritus, an advisory position he held for seven years.

He frequently traveled to Washington to keep legislation for Impact Aid alive for Midwest City and other schools in the state

and nation. He established “OASIS,” the Oklahoma Association of Schools for Impacted Services, serving as its president until he and his wife retired in 1982.

Nicholson remained on the Mid-Del staff under superintendents Lewis “Babe” Eubanks and John Folks. Her duties expanded beyond district attendance and Impact Aid to include personnel records management.

She kept in close contact with Mr. and Mrs. Sutton. The Suttons had two daughters of their own, Sherry and Jayne (both MCHS graduates), but Shirley likely counted as a third.

“I had started work for Mr. Sutton at age 17. He thought of me as one of his kids,” Nicholson said.

She and her husband Paul began the practice of holding a birthday party at their home for the Suttons



Mr. J.E. Sutton, Jr., MCHS principal, 1943-1962; Mid-Del deputy superintendent, 1962-1969; Mid-Del superintendent, 1969-1975; superintendent emeritus, 1975-1982. Mr. Sutton gave his all to the start-up and growth of Midwest City High School. He was inducted with the first class of honorees in the MCHS Wall of Fame in 1992. He was inducted in the Oklahoma Educators Hall of Fame in 1996. He lived and wrote the school’s history and shared it with faculty, alumni, and community groups over and over. He was a founding Board member of MCHS Museum, Inc. He died hours before the museum was to open on September 29, 2001.

each year in February (Irene was born on February 14, Jay, on February 15). They invited retired teachers to attend.

Sutton had been principal to the first 19 MCHS graduating classes, 1944 through 1962.

In 1996, those classes nominated him for the Oklahoma Educators Hall of Fame.

“There was an evening ceremony at the Clarion Hotel in Oklahoma City. The other inductees had their families there. But Mr. Sutton had admirers – several hundred alumni and friends from Midwest City,” Nicholson said.

Sutton had high regard for the MCHS Class of 1960, Nicholson said. Under Coach Darnell, “the football team had won the first state championship, and the team was strong academically. Many of the players went on to outstanding careers. Mr. Sutton was proud of that.”

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In 1998, a small group of alumni from the 1940s and 1950s proposed a Midwest City High School museum to preserve school history and involve the people

who lived it and made it.

Dr. Cheryl Steele, Mid-Del superintendent, offered the former front lobby of the school as a museum site, and the Board of Education allotted \$100,000 for renovation.

Midwest City High School Museum, Inc. was organized on April 13, 1999. Sutton joined Damon Wingfield (Class of 1947), president, Robert Croak (Class of 1959), David N. Fox (Class of 1949), Jennie Lee Maynard (Class of 1950) and Paul W. Nicholson (Shirley’s husband and a CPA) on the Board of Directors.

Shirley Nicholson was asked to be historian of the start-up effort and manage the administrative duties of the Board.

Sutton made the first contribution toward the

\$30,000 balance required to purchase display cases and furnish the interior. His cancelled check is framed and on display in the museum.

Not long after, Sutton's health began to fail. He and his wife moved to Ft. Smith, Arkansas, near the home of their oldest daughter, Sherry, and her family.

But he eagerly anticipated the grand opening of the MCHS Museum, set for September 29, 2001.

A MCHS graduate made arrangements to fly to Ft. Smith and transport the Suttons to Midwest City for the big event.

Sutton tried his best to be physically ready. "He had been undergoing radiation treatment and was in rehabilitation to learn to use a scooter," Nicholson said. "A few days before, he called and told me to tell the pilot he wouldn't be able to come but to know we would be in his prayers and thoughts."

Hours before the ribbon cutting, Sutton suffered a blow to the head in a fall at his home and died.

Just after superintendent Steele cut the ribbon opening the museum, Wingfield interrupted the tour to



On Rose Appreciation Day in 1967, Mr. Rose announces that the field house under construction south of MCHS will be named for J.E. Sutton. Mr. Sutton's face clouds with emotion in this photo from the 1968 *Bomber* yearbook.

announce Sutton's death.

"I left, I couldn't stay. It was so upsetting, and I knew I would get called by Irene and the funeral home because I had Mr. Sutton's obituary in my computer," Nicholson said.

She remembers Jim Darnell, her colleague of almost 50 years, hugging her in sympathy and support. (One month later, the school would name the football stadium after Darnell).

"Mr. Sutton's dream was this museum. I could just imagine how proud he would have been, because, while he might have been superintendent of these other schools, this school, Midwest City High School, was his," Nicholson said.

Mrs. Sutton died in 2007 and was buried alongside her husband at Midwest City's Arlington Cemetery. They had been married 62 years.

Class of 1964 graduate Garry Avery and his wife Norma purchased the Suttons' former home at 3402 Bella Vista Dr. "I was the second generation to go to school to Mr. Sutton. He taught my father in Pryor. It's special to live here," Garry said.

Reconnection 2020 - Exciting Museum Renewal Project!



Out of admiration for Mr. Sutton and the Classes of the 1940s and 1950s who started MCHS Museum in 2001, Class of 1964 is proposing architectural and archival updates to preserve and enhance their good work. Members volunteered their career expertise in developing the plan for using new technology to protect fragile memorabilia, digitize the holdings, and make them available for viewing and research on computers and projection screens. Interior improvements will shift the focus from static museum artifacts to interactive history center. Definable steps and projects will draw participation from other classes and friends of MCHS over the 5-year timetable for Reconnection 2020.

Left: Curator Shirley Nicholson (l) and MCHS principal Chris Reynolds (Class of 1991) examine '64 Tony Callaway's architectural drawings for the museum as he describes them from his Richardson firm during a conference call in April 2014. Also participating are '64 project members Chaniece Kennedy Harkey and Marty Thompson, who bring 40 years of management and library science/archival skills, respectively.