



## **MICHAEL CASSIDY**

### **LPSD Hall of Fame Legacy Award**

*“Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present.” - Albert Camus*

In 1965, when Michael Cassidy joined Lewis-Palmer School District as a counselor and coach, 84 students attended Lewis-Palmer High School. At that time, the Tri-Lakes area was a rural community comprised of sprawling ranches, family-owned farms, and the two small towns of Monument and Palmer Lake. There was one stop light. It seemed that everyone knew and watched out for each other. An LPHS graduate who grew up in the area recalls, “After my friends and I caused a bit of mischief four houses down from mine, we bolted home. In the short time it took me to get [home], a neighbor who had been watching us the whole time had called my parents and told them everything. That’s what people did.” It was a time when LPHS dismissed on Fridays at noon, so that everyone could go to the home football games. Because there was no stadium, games were held before dark on an unlit field. This, however, didn’t deter the community from lining the sidelines. For away games, busloads of students, staff, and parents traveled to other rural schools. As one LPHS graduate of that era explains, “The schools were the heart of the Tri-Lakes community.” When Mr. Cassidy retired in 1988, the community had grown exponentially, and LPHS had grown to 700 students.

In 1935, Mike Cassidy was born in Mann, West Virginia. He had a brother and two sisters. His mother died after the birth of his sister, and his grandmother raised him. After graduating from high school, Mike attended Western State College in Gunnison on a football scholarship. He was the college’s first three time all-conference player. After earning degrees in physical education and business administration, he served in the United States Army from 1951-1958. After his military service, Mike taught in Seibert, Colorado. In 1970, he earned a master’s degree from Western State.

Mike served District 38 in a variety of roles. In 1968, his LPHS track team won the state championship, and he was awarded the Gazette Telegraph Track Coach of the Year. Over the years, he served as administrator assistant in charge of extra-curricular activities, athletic director, and assistant principal in charge of attendance and discipline. A former student athlete describes Coach Cassidy as kind, caring, and incredibly supportive and shared, “He came out to one of my college track meets, and this blew me away.” As athletic director, Mike

ushered in the initial implementation of Title XI which made it a legal requirement for public schools to give girls equal access to athletic programs. Mike wholeheartedly believed that playing high school sports and participating in extra-curricular activities were a crucial part of every student's education. Mike used activities and athletics to keep students engaged in academics while at the same time learning life lessons of teamwork, accountability, service, and perseverance. A former student athlete recalls that Assistant Principal Cassidy not only attended every game, play, and dance, but he also watched practices and rehearsals as well. Mike often followed up with students offering advice, encouragement, and, when necessary, a bit of forthright motivation for improving either effort or attitude. Participating in athletics provided Mike direction and taught him values that he lived by, including honesty, integrity, and work ethic. As a coach and activities/athletic director, he instilled these qualities in students and other coaches.

As a school leader, he did the same for the staff. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, numerous teachers were hired to accommodate the tremendous growth in the area. Mr. Cassidy was always ready to guide these new teachers. A now retired 30-year teacher recalls his early years in the profession, "Without the care and mentoring of Mike Cassidy, I may have only taught two years." Mike was considered exceptional in the area of teacher evaluation and mentoring. Another long-time LPHS teacher and coach, now retired, reflects, "As a young, inexperienced teacher when I needed advice, I went to Mike. When I needed help with coaching skills, I asked Mike. When my career was struggling, I went to Mike." Another teacher gives insight into the trust and collegiality Mike had with staff members. "We were family first and foremost. We were treated with respect, given opportunities to grow professionally. Every member of the family had a role to play, and we were always there to support each other. Mike was fair and honest. He was not afraid to speak his mind and certainly was not afraid to advocate for what was truly best for kids." Mike truly enjoyed spending time with his colleagues. There were staff family get-togethers and snow day card games. There were staff basketball and softball teams. Mike was at the center of this camaraderie, and it benefitted more than staff morale and productivity. Several former students expressed the following sentiment: "Our teachers really liked each other. You could tell they were happy to be there. It made for a fun place to go to school."

Mike made everyone feel important. He was sincerely interested in others and made time for one and all. He listened, told entertaining stories, encouraged, cajoled, and advised. He had a gift for seeing and appreciating everyone's uniqueness. He practiced no one-size-fits-all approach knowing instinctively when, how, and with whom to push and when to nurture or step back. Former students recount, "He had a way of getting out of a kid exactly what was needed. He didn't give it to them, just pushed them far enough to have them do it themselves," and "He was an optimistic problem-solver. He helped me recognize the problem and address

how I could fix it. He was a help-me-help-you kind of guy.” Mike was especially adept at relating to students who struggled with school and home issues. One former student recalls how Mr. Cassidy guided him not only through a very rocky adolescence but a difficult young adulthood saying, “Mr. Cassidy is the mentor who saved me. He taught me the value of making positive, healthy choices.”

In Mike’s long career, he was absent a mere two days. This steady commitment of time and energy could not have happened without the support of his family. His children Kevin and Shauna Lambros, both LPHS graduates, have gone on to enjoy successful careers and now have families of their own. Kevin and Shauna’s mother Janice supported Mike throughout his career while at the same time making significant contributions to LPSD as a highly respected middle school English teacher. Mike’s is a legacy of vitality, caring, and community. Mike Cassidy’s spirit of selfless generosity continues to resonate in the many lives he touched and in the rich traditions of Lewis-Palmer High School and District 38.

By Caryn Collette