



## Roman Catholic Foundation

of

EASTERN MISSOURI

### Mr. Edward J. Auer - Creating a Lasting Impact

Often the lessons of the past can help us in the present to improve our lives or our community as a whole. The story of Edward J. Auer is one example. His outstanding leadership as well as his students' success in creating a lasting tribute serve as models for us all to follow.

It has been many years since St. Francis De Sales Parish in south St. Louis City was the thriving center of the community. From the 1940s into the early 1970s, Mr. Auer was an active teacher as well as coach to many students. If you ask many of his former students, coach and history teacher Mr. Auer was a mountain of a man, and not just because of his physical fitness. They refer to the impact he made on their lives.

His influence was so significant in helping them become who they are that some of these former students convened in 2001 to establish the Edward J. Auer Endowment Fund for Education in his honor. In March of 2015, the Fund's Board of Directors, comprised of these former students, transferred the Fund to the Roman Catholic Foundation of Eastern Missouri.

In its first 13 years, the Fund distributed \$80,000 in scholarships to the Catholic schools or their successors that Mr. Auer attended as a youth or influenced as a teacher, primarily St. Frances Cabrini Academy (formerly St. Francis De Sales and Notre Dame elementary schools) and St. Mary's High School (formerly Southside Catholic High School), Bishop DuBourg High School and St. John the Baptist High School. At the Foundation, the scholarships will continue, with the Board of the Edward J. Auer Memorial Scholarship Endowment Fund setting the Fund's long-term purpose and maintaining a leadership role as long as they choose.

The Board decided to move the Fund to the Foundation to ensure their good work continues. "None of us are getting any younger," says Barbara (Wessels) Tubbesing, a former student of Mr. Auer. "We needed the Fund where we knew it would continue honoring Mr. Auer and serve the same purpose long after we have departed this life."

### The Mentor

This Fund is named for Mr. Auer, the man who didn't need to talk to teach them to be good human beings. His actions spoke much louder. A daily communicant, Mr. Auer was genuine. "We knew what he was saying was real, because he lived it every day," Barbara says. His impact on her was significant.

From participating, with Mr. Auer's urging, in plays through the Chi Ro Club, an athletic, religious formation and social club, to becoming editor of the school newspaper, Barbara still, 50 years later, regards him as the greatest mentor she ever had in her life. When she was asked to write a paper in a college course some thirty years later about who was the biggest and most positive influence in her life, she knew immediately it would be Mr. Auer. Her husband Frank, who passed

away in 2006, was also one of Mr. Auer's students. "One of Frank's favorite sayings was 'If you are going to do a job, do it right,' this statement was a direct result of knowing Mr. Auer," says Barbara.

She is not alone in her enthusiasm about Mr. Auer, who she says gave her courage to be spiritual and did it without being preachy. "He let it be known what was right, and we wanted to emulate him," she says. Mr. Auer taught the students to say three Hail Marys every day, a practice many of them continue today.

Mr. Auer helped mold young ladies as well as young men. Richard "Dick" Carr met Mr. Auer at the age of eight through his older sister Dorothy (Carr) Zak while he was a student at St. Francis De Sales Grade School. The two formed a bond that grew even stronger after Dick's dad passed away when he was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. "We learned how to live a good Christian life from Mr. Auer," says Dick. "He taught us to be ready to give and not just take."

Dorothy shares Dick's appreciation of Mr. Auer. "He was always there for us," she says. "He taught me the importance of being there for others, and thanks to Mr. Auer, I try to always be there for my family and neighbors." Dick credits Mr. Auer with teaching them the importance of prayer and retreats. Mr. Auer was a Retreat Captain at the White House Jesuit Retreat. After watching Mr. Auer regularly taking time away to regroup and to become closer to God, Dick and many other students adopted the practice and still continue to take an annual retreat.

Not only do Barbara, Dick and Dorothy give thanks to Mr. Auer for providing them with outstanding guidance, but Walter "Wally" Feld also believes he is a better man for having known him. Wally attended St. Francis De Sales High School from 1956 to 1960 and caught Mr. Auer's eye in his junior year because of his long legs. At 6'5" and 170 lbs, Mr. Auer wanted him on the school's basketball team. While the time needed to pursue basketball would have conflicted with Wally's after-school job to earn money for college tuition, Mr. Auer's interest, understanding and encouragement resulted in a bond that made a lasting impression on the young man. "Mr. Auer was a model of what a good Catholic male, religiously-bent person could be," says Wally. "He was always involved in school functions and gave us advice and counsel. He became a spiritual guide throughout my life."

## **Socializing**

Mr. Auer helped provide a positive environment for the teens to socialize. "Mr. Auer, along with Father Wenceslaus Klaric, Monsignor Wempe, Father Vincent Stolzer, Father Anthony Bukauskas, Father William Scheid, Father Robert Ottoline and Mr. Thomas Kage, among others, began the Chi Rho Club, the youth section of the Benton Dramatic Club. The Chi Rho Club members had access to a clubroom that was located at St. Francis De Sales," says Dick. This club featured a dance floor, jukebox, ping pong, pool tables, snack food and even a bar for young people who had reached drinking age. Mr. Auer and Mr. Kage were constants, providing solid, strong leadership and an example of how to be a good man to the teens.

Mr. Auer even began the "Dance Masters," a club to teach the young people to dance. They learned not only the popular dances, but also traditional ballroom dancing. "Many of us still enjoy the dancing that we learned as part of the "Dance Masters," says Dick.

Martie Aboussie, another of Mr. Auer's students, recalls the man taking the students to the movies on a Saturday night. "I remember watching Sidney Poitier and Lilia Skala in 'Lilies of the Field,'" says Marty. "He was a just a saint, a beautiful person." Former student Don Ross agrees, "He sacrificed so much for all of us. Having him as a teacher, coach and mentor meant a lot to all of us."

## **The Coach**

Mr. Auer provided spiritual leadership while keeping the students active. A well-rounded athlete himself, Mr. Auer and Mr. Kage were the committed leaders of St. Francis De Sales' well known and successful athletic program, coaching boys and girls in basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball and even gymnastics. "Once we graduated, he asked us to return to help him coach the younger kids," says Dick. He credits Mr. Auer for so much of who he became. A vivid memory that Dick and the other students will never forget is singing "99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall" while traveling to and from games in the parish's World War II Army Surplus bus they called "Betsy."

## **The Visionary**

Guiding his students to be physically and spiritually fit was not all Mr. Auer imparted on his students. He also nurtured their leadership skills. Former Visitation Academy Principal and Mr. Auer student Maxine (Dempsey) Adlersfluegel sees Mr. Auer as key to her ability to lead. "I would sing his praises from a mountain top," she says. "He taught us to be leaders." After attending St. Agatha Grade School, Maxine attended St. Francis De Sales High School, because of Mr. Auer. She wanted to play softball for him, but she gained much more than athletic skills.

"Mr. Auer was all about developing the faith dimension of a person," she says. "We learned through Mr. Auer how to live the teachings of St. Francis De Sales." One of many things she credits Mr. Auer for teaching her is the importance of asking people to be involved. "He taught me I have to ask people to do things. It is part of evangelizing," she says.

Later in life, Mr. Auer became a Deacon, as further testament to his desire to be closer to Christ. Many of these former students attended the ceremony, just as Mr. Auer attended their weddings, funerals and other major life events. Mr. Auer died on May 5, 2012 at the age of 89. Many of his former students also attended his funeral.

Mr. Auer never married and instead made forming good Catholic adults as his primary focus. In recognition of his lifetime of being a good and faithful servant, Mr. Auer's alma mater, now St. Mary's High School, honored him posthumously in 2014 by inducting him into the St. Mary's High School Hall of Fame with their Meritorious Service Award.

When throwing a stone into the water, the act creates a chain of events well beyond the initial impact. After 50 years, the impact that this mountain of a man can still be felt. "When we created the Fund, we wanted to recognize Mr. Auer and to create something that would perpetuate his impact on more children, as he impacted so many young people during his lifetime," says Don. The Edward J. Auer Memorial Scholarship Endowment Fund will continue at the Foundation for generations to come.