

'It's my town,' says Clarenceville's 'mayor' Sam Prisk

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

He's the Mayor of Clarenceville. After 20 years as a member of the Clarenceville Board of Education, Sam Prisk has acquired that unofficial title and a liking for the district. "We're like a dog that thinks it's a human. We're a school district but also a community. We're a community that thinks it's a town. "Our school district is our heart, our center. "It's my town," said Prisk, trying to explain how a year-long commitment to the school board multiplied by 20. With three children in the district, Prisk, 57, was active in PTA and other parent activity when he was approached to fill an empty school board seat vacated by a man whose company had transferred him from the area. "I was asked to finish out the year," Prisk said with an amused tone while sitting in his dental office in Redford. "Once I got involved, I enjoyed it. I felt like I was contributing."

BESIDES HIS DUTIES as a school board trustee, Prisk remains active in parent groups, even though his own children have since graduated from Clarenceville schools.

When the Clarenceville band travels to Mexico this spring, Prisk will be along on the trip as a chaperone and photographer. The trip will combine his love for children with another keen interest — photography.

Developing his own black and white photographs, Prisk enjoys taking pictures of school events and students. Some of his photos have appeared in high school yearbooks. His color slides have won him two awards in Kodak photo contests.

One of the award-winning photos, a color shot of three Boy Scouts folding an American flag, won first place in the Kodak contest.

Patients in his office pass the photo daily; it's tacked to the door of one of his examining rooms.

The photo also illustrates another continuing interest in Prisk's life — the Boy Scouts. He's a member of the group's executive board and is their activities chairman.

"I've been in Boy Scouts since I was 12 years old. I've never been out," he said.

THE SCOUTS return to an emphasis on outdoors activities suits Prisk. The group's previous emphasis on teaching city-oriented skills to inner city boys bothered Prisk, who believes the camping activities should be open to city and suburban youngsters.

The Boy Scouts gives Prisk a chance to indulge in his love for the outdoors. A variety of outdoor magazines are displayed on racks in his office's waiting room.

Fishing and jogging help Prisk to unwind. Five evenings a week Prisk will jog three to four miles.

"It helps keep me in shape." It also helps Prisk to cope with his wife Janet's cooking.

"She's an excellent homemaker, a great cook. One of the reasons I jog is that she's such a great cook," he says of his wife of 33 years.

Together they raised three children, sons Jim, 31, and Matthew, 20, and daughter Laurie, 24.

Their eldest son teaches physical education and their younger son is studying at Alma College for the same career. Their daughter is a registered nurse.

THE SONS ARE carrying out what amounts to a tradition in the Prisk family. Prisk's mother taught in Farmington schools for more than 30 years. His sister is a teacher married



Sam Prisk is a man who likes to feel he is contributing to children's lives. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

to a school superintendent. His brother Bill is an assistant superintendent of the Farmington schools. "Public education is the basis of this democratic system," Prisk said. "Ours in the United States is the best there is. It's public and available to everyone."

In his years of activity within the Clarenceville system, Prisk has seen some major changes in education. The advent of teachers' unions changed schools, he maintains.

"It eliminated personality conflicts as the reason for hiring and firing. That's good in any profession. It gave teachers a better sense of security," he said. The turmoil of the '60s left some needed changes in its wake, according to Prisk.

"There's more awareness on the part of the young. They caused some of us older people to look at the things we were doing. Many good things came out of the rebellious attitude."

But the youngsters of the '60s were not that different from their predecessors. "I really don't think that kids change from generation to generation," he said.

"WE THOUGHT we shook up the world in the '40s," he added in an amused tone.

But unlike those students of 20 years ago who were sure they were shaking up the world, today's youngsters have more to learn in school.

"There's much more that a youngster has to learn to take his place in society. The question is, where do we start and where do we stop? We try to give them as much as we can. Perhaps we're guilty of not giving them as much in one area as in another," he said.

During his school days, Prisk toyed with the idea of becoming a teacher or a lawyer. But he enjoyed first aid classes and began to consider the medical profession.

"I didn't go through school with the idea that I was going to be a dentist," he said.

In one corner of his waiting room he displays a mug inscribed, "Painless Dentist."

"It doesn't have to be painful nowadays," said Prisk, who spends evenings perusing professional publications.

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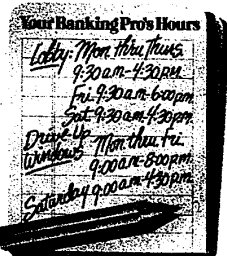
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