

Stadium May Be Named After First Principal

by DAVID BAILEY, with contributions from RANDY SOUTHARD, SANDY GANN and ROGER NELSON

NW GUILFORD COUNTY

The late Roscoe L. Billings was the first principal of Northwest Guilford High School, serving from 1962 to 1980. Billings accepted the daunting task of opening the newly consolidated high school which brought students in from four separate communities – Colfax, Oak Ridge, Summerfield and Stokesdale. It was his job to hire faculty, office, custodial and cafeteria staff, bus drivers and coaches.

Additionally, he supervised the purchase of textbooks, educational materials and equipment, and established class schedules and bus routes.

When the school opened in 1962, there was one athletic field and a stadium with no bleachers or lights. Billings is credited with organizing fund-raisers, establishing lines of credit and even securing personal loans which got the athletic program off the ground. Equally impressive, he developed a coaching staff without being able to offer any guarantee of income.

A survey of future students prior to the school opening in 1962 showed that less than 16 percent of those who responded planned to go on to college. Learning this, Billings immediately began to develop both a college prep and a vocational program. The then-principal also took special interest in students who struggled academically. For some students he even personally provided tutoring.



NWO File Photo

Roscoe Billings served as Northwest High School's first principal.

Randy Southard, a member of the NWHHS graduating class of 1970, notes that Billings took Northwest through the difficult process of integration in 1965, one year ahead of the superintendent's directive. "He did it a year early," says Southard, "making him a front-runner in race relations."

Summerfield Mayor Mark Brown was a student at Northwest High School when Billings was

the principal there. "He was short in stature – like I am – but he was big in respect," says Brown.

And according to those who knew him, Billings could command respect even among the rowdiest students. "I

“I can still picture him looking up to some of those tall students (telling them to behave) ... The whole atmosphere changed. You just had a sense that he was in charge.”

— RANDY SOUTHARD

NWHHS CLASS OF 1970

can still picture him looking up to some of those tall students (telling them to behave)," says Southard. "That would be at any sporting event. The whole atmosphere changed. You just had a sense that he was in charge."

Roger Nelson was a basketball coach at Northwest in the early years, and later

became a Northwest principal himself. Sandy Gann joined the Northwest faculty in 1966 and spent his entire career there as a teacher and baseball coach. Last fall, Nelson, Gann and Southard began talking at a football game about how they could honor Billings. That's when they came up with the idea of naming the football stadium after him, just as the Northwest baseball field was

See **STADIUM**, page 38

Stadium

(Continued from page 29)

named after Gann in 2005. The idea gained momentum as it was shared with others.

Before naming a school facility after someone, the Guilford County School Board confirms that the individual has made important contributions to the community, and that there is broad-based community support for the naming.

Southard believes that there will be ample support for naming the stadium after Billings. Viking Vision, an organization working to improve and expand athletic facilities at NWHS, is circulating petitions that urge the school board to give the honor to the former principal.

According to Brown, the Summer-

field Town Council passed a resolution on May 2 in support of naming the field after Billings. Stokesdale passed a similar resolution at its April meeting.

By the end of the summer, Southard hopes to present evidence of community support to Guilford County School superintendent Terry Grier. Grier may then recommend to the school board that they approve the naming of the stadium after Billings. If the process goes well, a dedication ceremony may be planned at a football game this fall.

Anyone interested in showing support for naming the NWHS football stadium for Roscoe Billings can send letters of support to Randy Southard, 7204-B West Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410 or RJS@ProBeneA.com.