

Nathan Bridwell: ‘He was Mr. Jasonville’

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By Patti Danner



Nathan Bridwell of Jasonville truly leaves the town a better place for having lived there.

Bridwell will always remain in the hearts and memories of those who knew and worked with him.

Born in 1919, Bridwell graduated from Midland High School, Indiana University and Indiana State Teachers College.

A gifted educator, Bridwell taught art and music to multitudes of students at Sullivan High School during his 38 years there, which is where Bridwell met Ron Riggs. Riggs was a social studies teacher at the time and remembers Bridwell, who was also the Audio-Visual Director for Southwest School Corporation, as a true champion of youth.

“We used a lot of movies in the social studies curriculum,” said Riggs. “And I remember calling down to the A/V room to request them. Nathan would send some of the wildest-looking kids up there to bring the movies and the equipment. I mentioned something to him one time, and he said ‘those boys will be fine,’ he had faith in them.

Well, today those particular boys are all church leaders and successful businessmen. Nathan gave them a chance, he knew they were good people, knew they would do well.”

Riggs knew Bridwell for more than 50 years, and called him a “Renaissance man,” the definition of which is “an outstandingly versatile, well-rounded person”.

“Nathan had so many interests and he was constantly thinking,” said Riggs. “He had the ability to multi-task, focus one-on-one and would drop whatever he was doing when somebody needed help.”

Jasonville Mayor Roy Terrell said Bridwell truly left his mark on the city, a mark that will likely last forever.

“Nathan was instrumental in bringing the medical center to Jasonville, among other things,” Terrell said “He was very deserving of the Ed Sheppard award he received in August of this year. He was always nominating people for awards and recognition, and he deserved so many himself.”

The annual Ed Sheppard award bestowed by the Jasonville City Council is awarded to citizens who go beyond the call of duty to make Jasonville a better place to live.

Sheppard was a bank cashier when Jasonville suffered from a great fire in 1914 that almost completely destroyed its business district. At a time when most residents were stunned by the trauma, Sheppard grabbed a shovel and started cleaning debris. As a result of his actions, other residents followed, and Jasonville recovered from the catastrophic event. Recipients of the award are invariably champions of the town. Other past recipients of the Ed Sheppard award are Howard Lee, Fred Bennett, Jack Ridinger and Floyd Rash.

At the announcement of Bridwell’s win he was noted to have nominated others for the award in the past and as being very deserving of the award, as well as being a big asset to the creation of the Shakamak Medical Center. While he was unable to make it to the meeting, Mayor Roy Terrell stated he and council member Brad Duncan would present him with the award in person at his home.

Brad Duncan said Bridwell was often called “Mr. Jasonville.”

“He was just the best, such a nice man. He never met a stranger and he was always truly pleasant to be around.”

Bridwell left his mark of love on whatever he was involved in, which included education, the Jasonville Medical Center which opened its doors Sept. 9, 2013, the Jasonville Chamber of Commerce, Shakamak School Board and other civic groups and projects.

Terrell said Bridwell was first to nominate others for recognition, and last to seek such attention for himself.

Jasonville resident Joe Wise was one such person nominated for an award by Bridwell.

In 2016, Bridwell, then 96, nominated Wise for the Greene County Daily World’s inaugural Difference Maker award. This award is given annually to Greene County residents who make a positive impact on the lives of others in Greene County.

In his nomination of Wise, Bridwell listed the many selfless acts of Wise, including Wise's actions in responding to the plight of victims of hurricanes and tornadoes, as well as Wise's yearly work with the Salvation Army.

"Both," Bridwell wrote, "make Joe Wise worthy of being called a Difference Maker."

He wrote of Wise's work in getting the medical center off the ground and of Wise's position as trustee of the Shakamak Community Church.

"Nathan was the guy who actually got the ball rolling on the medical center," said Wise of Bridwell. "On that and on so many other things. He raised a lot of funds for various things. Some people don't know this, but it was Nathan who raised the matching funds to get the (Good Samaritan) nursing home in Jasonville started. He was always reading, always thinking. In fact, he had read the entire bible more than 120 times. He was constantly conscious of ways he could help other people. He was tireless, arranging meetings, writing congressmen and legislators, anything he could do."

Wise knew Bridwell for about 40 years, meeting him when Bridwell called to see if Wise and his crew could help him construct some raised flower beds. Wise said Bridwell was the only music teacher he knew who could say he had literally given a piece of himself to his work.

"I don't recall the details of how it happened, but somehow Nathan had an altercation with a music stand at work," said Wise, "That music stand cut his finger clean off."

Wise also remembers Bridwell faithfully attending Wednesday night bible study at Shakamak, located just across the street from his home. Bridwell was a member of Lebanon Baptist Church, but enjoyed bible study nights at the church in Jasonville.

"I remember it was a Wednesday, bible study night, and Nathan was moving that Friday to Indianapolis," said Pastor Riggs. "He just wasn't well enough to come over to the church, so we gathered up our stuff and we went to him."

Riggs and Wise were both there that night, and Riggs said it was extra special, as they let Bridwell choose the study, their last together before Bridwell relocated to Hoosier Village Health Center in Indianapolis, close to his two daughters.

It was there, said Riggs, that Nathan Bridwell offered two final messages for all those who visited and inquired about him.

"He had two things to impart near the end," said Riggs. "One, he said he was doing just fine. And two, he said he was ready to go. His wish was that everybody who was praying for him would stop, and just say 'hallelujah' for him. He was ready, and he wanted everyone to be happy for him."

Nathan Bridwell got that final wish. At his funeral, Saturday, Oct. 28, Riggs and all of his fellow mourners said a collective 'hallelujah' for Nathan Bridwell, and we can be sure Bridwell received it with a big smile from up above.

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