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Saum Honored For Stellar Teaching Career

Foundation Begins Annual Award To Recognize Retirees

By JEFF MELLOTT
Daily News-Record

Robert Winston Saum Sr. went to medical school for one year.

Because of that, his chemistry students at Harrisonburg High School liked to call Saum "Doc," said Dr. William Lee, one of

those students who 40 years ago benefited from Saum's career decision to teach.

"How many lives did he change for the positive by making that decision?" Lee, of Harrisonburg Medical Associates, asked his audience.

Honored

On Wednesday, Lee and the Harrisonburg Education Foundation honored Saum posthumously as the

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Courtesy photo

Robert Winston Saum Sr. touched the lives of many.

A Native Of Harrisonburg, Saum Taught For 30 Years

Saum

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organization's first retired outstanding teacher. Rockingham National Bank sponsored the award. Saum died in 1998 at age 70.

A native of the city, Saum taught at his alma mater for 30 years beginning in 1960.

Lee and the foundation presented Dorothy Saum, the honoree's wife, with a framed photo and history outlining his career.

Saum, also survived by sons Robert and Keith, lives on, Dorothy said, through the lives of the people he touched as students. "He loved to explain things," she said of her late husband. "He enjoyed the teaching. He loved the students."

Students remembered Saum after they graduated, said Keith Saum, a design engineer for Walker Manufacturing.

Keith Saum, 55, of Harrisonburg, said his father was always interested in his former

students' progress.

Saum retired because of health reasons, Keith Saum said.

Teacher

Lee paid tribute to Saum as an innovative, inspiring and, at times, tough teacher.

Saum developed the advanced chemistry class at the high school, and he contributed to state and national science publications.

But Saum, Lee said, was almost like a peer the way he encouraged his students. "He would joke with you," he said. "His enthusiasm was truly infectious and inspired the students to do the very best for him and it brought out the very best in the students."

Inside or outside the classroom, Lee said, Saum was like a quiet cheerleader. "You could always tell he was rooting for you," Lee said.

Former students, Lee said, also remember Saum as being very demanding in the classroom.

"He challenged you all the

time," Lee recalled. "You always wanted to do your best just for him."

Scholar

Saum attended Bridgewater College and graduated from James Madison University.

He attended the medical school at the University of Virginia but family obligations contributed to him leaving the school after one year.

He returned to James Madison University and secured his teaching certificate.

Saum's abilities received recognition outside the school division.

In 1969, the Virginia Board of Education selected Saum and one other teacher to attend the Virginia Flight Youth Seminars in Florida to watch the launch of the second manned mission to the moon, Apollo 12.

The next year, the Virginia section of the American Chemical Society named Saum as their recipient of the distinguished service award.

The Greater Madison Asso-

ciation named him educator of the year in 1976.

The honors are expected to continue.

Lee said letters from former students will be delivered to Dorothy Saum.

Also, the foundation has made it possible to provide donations in Saum's honor. For more information, donors can contact Craig Mackail, the foundation's director, at 434-9916.

Created in 1994, the Harrisonburg Education Foundation is a non-profit organization that provides financial and other support for city public schools, according to its Web site.

Donors can make tax-deductible gifts to the division through the foundation.

The foundation is governed by a board of directors that represents business, industry, higher education, public schools and community organizations, the Web site said.

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