

# THE 1955 TROJAN *Alumni* PRINTS

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## Jerry Lucas

In my senior year at Portsmouth High School (1954-1955) the Trojans had an outstanding basketball team. During the regular season we won 15 games and lost only 3. Our tournament record ended at 5 and 1 when we lost to Cincinnati Hughes. Overall, Coach George Heller's miraculous "Six Shooters" posted a fine record of 20 wins and 4 losses.

One of the things that made that 54-55 season great was that the Trojans made a clean sweep of Ohio's perennial cage powers. We defeated Middletown, Hamilton, and Springfield each twice--both in Grant Gym and on their home floors.

In the seventh game of the season the Trojans beat Middletown 81 to 60 at Middletown. Billy Clifford was the Trojan's high scorer with 28 points with Curt Gentry close behind with 24 points. In the twelfth game of the season, at U.S. Grant gymnasium, PHS beat the Middies 56 to 41. This time Curt Gentry led the Trojans with 18 points and Milt Parker was close on his heels with 14 points.

I'm sure that you recall all the names of those "Six Shooters": senior Curt Gentry, senior Milton Parker, senior Billy Clifford, junior Jerry Higgins, junior Don "Duck" Frazier, and junior Bruce Johnson. Coach Heller was assisted that season by Charles Lorentz and Richard Hopkins, Jr. Also, I wouldn't want to fail to mention our two fine senior basketball managers: Kenny Amick and Charlie McKelvey.

However, the next year a young sophomore from Middletown by the name of Jerry Lucas burst upon the Ohio basketball scene and everything changed. The Trojan 1955-1956 basketball season was still a good one. The Trojans went 16 and 7. But, they lost to Middletown three times that season, and it was all Jerry Lucas' fault! In fact, PHS couldn't defeat Middletown for as long as Jerry Lucas was on the team. We lost to the Middies twice during the 56-57 season and twice again during the 57-58 season. Unfortunately, the Trojans stood 0-7 against Middletown during the Lucas reign. It was not unusual for Lucas to score 30 to 40 points in games against Portsmouth--as he did with most other rivals.

Lucas was a six foot-eight inch phenomenon from a working class family (his father was a

pressman in a paper mill and his mother worked on an assembly line in a box factory) who only lost one game in the three years that he played varsity basketball for Middletown.

Lucas became the most dominating high school basketball player that the State of Ohio had seen to that point in time.

Fifty years ago (1956) Lucas, a sophomore, led Middletown to the big school (Class A) championship by scoring 97 points in the Middies' two state-tournament games in Cleveland.

In the semi-final game undefeated Middletown faced undefeated Cleveland East Tech. Middletown won easily, 99 to 78, and Lucas scored 53 points, a state tournament record. In the final game undefeated Middletown played Canton McKinley for the state crown. Again, Middletown easily topped Canton McKinley, 91 to 69, with Lucas scoring 44 points while holding his counterpart to a single point.

Middletown repeated as state champions the next year (57) and extended its winning streak to 76 games before losing to Columbus North in the state semi-finals in 58. The Middies' streak remains the longest in Ohio boys basketball history. Lucas twice earned Ohio Player of the Year and Parade magazine's All-American honor. He scored a state record of 2,466 points in his varsity career.

Middletown, a booming town in the 1950s (much like Portsmouth) always embraced its Middies. It is said that managers would have to shut down factories on basketball Friday nights because the workers would not show up for work, electing either to go to the games or stay home and listen to them on the radio.

Lucas would go on to win a national NCAA title at The Ohio State University, an Olympic gold medal in the 1960 games at Rome, and an NBA championship with the New York Knicks. He became the first player to win championships at all four levels (high school, college, Olympic, and professional).

After he graduated, Middletown's basketball program began a long decline, as did the city when the steel industry began to crumble. But for three years beginning some fifty years ago, Middletown was the center of the Ohio high school basketball universe--thanks to Jerry Lucas.

*Blaine Bierley*

## Oliver, McKibbin Honored

The Portsmouth-Scioto County League of Women Voters honored two local residents for what they consider their positive impact on the community.

Former Major League Baseball All-Star Al Oliver and local radio personality Sam McKibbin both were awarded the first annual Lacey Stratford Curtis Impact Award by the local LWV, as part of its imPACT Program for community involvement.

"Al Oliver has done many things, not only locally, but he's also associated with the Willie Stargill Kidney Foundation in North Carolina," said Marilee Stephenson, co-president of the local LWV. "Sam McKibbin is one of the last real news-

casters who really is a journalist. He prepares his own stories and he's very involved with local news." Stephenson said McKibbin has always helped with the educational efforts and publicity of the league.

"There's an old saying that you ought to do as much as you can, for as many as you can, for as long as you can," said McKibbin, who has had a career in broadcasting for 35 years, as well as participating in many local organizations, including the Hospice of Southern Ohio Advisory Board and the Ohio Military Reserves. Oliver says he's proud to accept this award.

"I feel good about it. Usually when you're honored in your home town, that tells you someone's thinking about you and are aware of the

Footnote:

More than 150 colleges showed interest in him. But Lucas didn't want to be bothered, and he entrusted his recruiting to his dad, coach Walker and Nardiello, sports editor at The Journal. Lucas made it known that if anyone approached him directly about playing college basketball, he wouldn't go to that college.

At least one famed coach, however, attempted to bypass Lucas' support group. During his senior season, Lucas was in English class when he heard a knock on the door. University of Kentucky coach Adolph Rupp was waiting in the hallway. "Adolph Rupp was a god in those times," Lucas said. But Lucas didn't care, and he let Rupp know that Kentucky was off the list. "I don't know how you got in the school, and I refuse to talk to anyone," Lucas remembers telling Rupp. "I don't want to be rude, but I have to go to English class. But you don't have to worry - I will never go to Kentucky."

In fact, Lucas visited just one college campus - Ohio State. And that's where he ultimately attended. "I liked the atmosphere of Ohio State," Lucas said. "I have always been pleased with that decision." OSU offered Lucas an academic scholarship, which he wanted, instead of an athletic one.

Lucas' commitment alone may have spawned OSU's basketball dynasty in the early 1960s. After his senior season in high school, Jerry Nardiello, the local newspaper sports director was driving Lucas back to Middletown from an all-star game in Fort Wayne, Ind., when Lucas disclosed his decision to those in the car. Riding with Nardiello was Ohio prep basketball star and future NBA great John Havlicek along with future OSU stand-outs Gary Gearhart and Mel Nowell.

Lucas convinced Havlicek to attend OSU during that ride, Nardiello said. Some consider those four players part of the greatest recruiting class in college basketball history. Behind them, the Buckeyes went 78-6 during three seasons, winning a national title and narrowly losing to Cincinnati in two others. "I doubt if any of them would have gone to Ohio State if it weren't for Lucas," Nardiello said

things you're doing," Oliver said. Since Oliver left MLB in 1985, he has traveled the world delivering motivational speeches, with the slogan, "Life's a hit, don't strike out." He also is a nominee to be inducted in the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2007.

As they were called to say a few words before accepting their awards, McKibbin spoke of the importance of voting in a democratic society. "I've always been disappointed in voter turnout," McKibbin said, noting that Scioto County did a little better in this past election with nearly 40 percent turnout. "In this land of the free and home of the brave, that's still not very good. There are some countries in Europe that turn out 90 percent of their electorate routinely."

## New U.S. Grant Bridge Opens

More than five years after the State of Ohio closed down the historic U. S. Grant Bridge over the Ohio River, Portsmouth city officials expressed relief that its upgraded replacement opened Monday, October 16, 2006.

The Ohio Department of transportation shut down the old U. S. Grant Bridge in July 2001 to begin a three-year project to dismantle and replace it with a wider bridge that could handle heavier loads. But the department said the project was delayed because of design problems, the weather and high water.

Portsmouth city officials said that the delay hurt business in downtown Portsmouth. They also said that it might take time for business to rebound because travelers are so accustomed to using the nearby Carl Perkins Bridge, where traffic was rerouted.

A Portsmouth city councilman said that just having the bridge open again will encourage more people to travel across the river. "It's the gateway to southern Ohio," he said. "I think it's going to be a great asset to our community."

## Best City to Live & Work In

Think you could name some of the best cities in which to live and work in the U.S.? Is Portsmouth, Ohio on your list? How about Rock Island, Illinois? Well they should be. They may be unlikely candidates because they don't have the same allure of the glamorous cities like New York or L.A. But when judged on their salaries and cost of living, they are among the top 5 metro areas out of more than 300 across the U.S. analyzed recently by Salary.com. They are also not the only midwestern cities that fared well. According to our analysis, many of the best cities were in the Midwest while the worst were on the coasts.

The more likely candidates for your top 5 would probably be the more well-known, fast paced cities of California or the historic business hubs of the Northeast, correct? Surprisingly, however, these don't even show up in the top 30, but instead are heavily present in the worst. Nine out of the top 10 worst metro areas for your paycheck are located in the West or Northeast.

## New PHS Sports Complex?

By JEFF TAEPKER  
PDT Sports Writer

Monday, October 23, 2006 11:32 PM EDT

Portsmouth High School is getting a new athletics complex. Past that, it's all up in the air.

The Portsmouth City School Board passed a resolution on Thursday that would allow the school to "explore and ascertain the feasibility and desirability of developing the site of the former Portsmouth High School and its surrounding area into an athletic complex" as well as a location for other education-related functions such as a central office and renovation of the former gymnasium. Although the school is in the process of finding an architect for the complex, the boundaries will stretch north from Gallia Street to Ninth Street and west from Waller to Findlay.

"It's going to be a brand new, first-class facility," said Portsmouth Athletic Director Tom Grashel. "We're looking at a new football stadium, a new baseball stadium and other things like a softball field and tennis courts. It's an open state."

There has been speculation about how much money the school will receive for the facility, as well as where the funds will come from. Portsmouth Superintendent Jan Broughton said all of the money will come from grants and denotations from the private sector, meaning there will be no involvement by the taxpayers.

"All I'll say is that the party wants to remain anonymous and that it is millions of dollars, but the final amount had not been determined," Broughton said. "There are benefactors. There could be more than one or two sources." Grashel said that the amount will be at least \$10 million, but could go higher if more parties get involved. "I've seen it happen at other schools where people think it's a good idea and want to help out as much as they can," he said.

Much of the athletic complex will be built on the site of the old Portsmouth High School, which is in the process of being demolished, but the old gym will remain standing. Hopefully, Grashel said, the school will use some of the money to renovate

the gym. The school, which owns the property the old school was built on, will use some of the funds to purchase extra lots around the school to expand the complex.

Most of the property the school needs is owned by realtor Neal Hatcher, though there are other property owners in the area. Hatcher said both he and the Portsmouth City School Board have been on hold because Hatcher was waiting for the go-ahead by a developer to build a shopping center in that area. When he didn't receive a call, Hatcher turned to the school board.

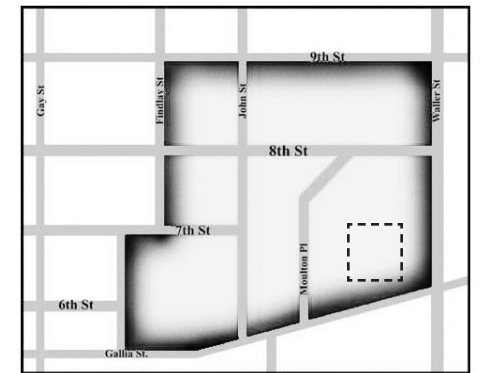
"I've been accumulating this property for eight or nine years for a shopping center," Hatcher said. "We've been working with developers for years, but nothing has developed with any of them. If the school board is interested in this project, I'm all for it, and will cooperate in any way possible to see it happen."

Broughton said some of the businesses around the area, and the Second Presbyterian Church, will be exempt from consideration when obtaining the necessary land for the project.

But with the project in its infant stages, there is still much to get accomplished before any action can be taken, she said.

However, when it is completed, the complex should be a boon to business in the downtown area as well as giving the Trojan athletes a new place to call home.

"If people want to get something to eat close by or go shopping after the game, they'll be able to," Grashel said. "It's a win-win situation."



Hilltop Fire Station



Scudder School



"Sugar Bowl" near Highland School

## Paul Walker

Former Portsmouth High Basketball Coach  
By Jake Trotter, Cox News Service  
Monday, December 19, 2005

On Dec. 16, 1955, the Middletown Middies had just defeated Portsmouth 75-62 on the road. After the game, the team went to a cafeteria-style restaurant in Portsmouth before heading home. But when the players - pleased with their fourth win of the season - sat down, social reality struck.

The restaurant refused to serve the team's sole black player Oliver Wallace. The whole team, outraged, walked out. They wouldn't eat without Wallace.

Walker was a quirky character. Dressed in a brown suit, he would eat oranges as games ended. And for the really big games, he packed an extra pair of shoes for Jerry Lucas. "He was always afraid something was going to happen to Lucas' sneakers," said Don Stokes, the team's manager in the late 1950s.

Walker was also the school's golf coach for many years. "He was the worst golfer and the worst golf coach," said Jack Gordon, Middletown's football coach during for much of Walker's tenure. "He'd tell (his team) to get that killer instinct, leave, then come back in two hours to check on them."

Another Walker paradox was that he was the driver's education teacher at Middletown. "He was the worst driver," Gordon said.

But while Walker hated to golf and didn't excel at driving, he loved to play cards. After practice and often before, Walker would invite other coaches to the coaches' office for a card game of pitch. And during, Walker would always be smoking cigarettes. "It didn't matter how big an ashtray he had, he would get ashes on the floor," said Ed Payne, who played on Walker's back-to-back state title teams in 1952 and 1953 and later would be his assistant coach.

Later in his coaching career, Walker showed up at practice smoking a cigarette. Coach, Payne said, you can't smoke at practice. "The hell I can't," Walker snapped back. "There has only been one Paul Walker," Gordon said. "He was a hell of a basketball coach and a hell of a guy. He'd do anything for you. And he knew the game of basketball."

One attribute that dazzled other Middletown coaches was Walker's ability to scout opposing teams in his head. He never took notes. "He was a terrific scout," said Jerry Nardiello, former Journal sports editor. Payne recalled the first time he scouted another team with Walker. Payne had charted the entire game, while Walker just watched. In the third quarter, Walker told Payne he was ready to leave. And he never used Payne's chart. "He was so quick on being able to analyze a kid and see the talent the kid had," Payne said. But Walker wasn't just a fun-loving spirit. He was a family man, too.

Walker was born on April 17, 1911, in Summerton, Tenn., about 40 miles north of the Alabama border. His father held various blue-collar jobs that took Walker, his mom and his brother to Alabama and later Kentucky. In Madisonville, Ky.,

his father was a track foreman at a strip mine.

After graduating from Madisonville (Ky.) High School, Walker attended Western Kentucky University, playing football and basketball. "Athletics was his way of raising himself up from that background as many athletes have done over the years," Walker Jr. said.

Following coaching stints at three different Kentucky high schools, Walker finally caught his break, which brought him to Ohio.

During World War II, Portsmouth High School's football coach had been drafted by the military, while the basketball coach took a commission in the armed services.

The military turned down Walker's attempt to join because of a bad knee injury he had incurred while playing football - Walker walked with a limp for the rest of his life.

The football coach, Huston Elder, a friend of Walker's, asked him to be both football and basketball coach at Portsmouth, and when Elder returned, Walker could be basketball coach.

Walker's basketball team went 12-11 in his first season. But it would be his only year at Portsmouth. The old basketball coach returned and demanded his job back. Portsmouth relented, and Walker was relegated to freshman basketball coach. And after Elder came back, Walker was demoted to assistant coach of the football team. Eventually, all three were fired as Portsmouth sought to eliminate an awkward situation.

At this time in 1946, Middletown was looking for a new basketball coach, hoping to keep up the momentum of the last three seasons. In 1944, Elmo Lingrel's Middies football team went 8-0-1.

Which team tied Lingrel in a scoreless game? That was Walker's Portsmouth club. So when the Middies basketball job became vacant again, Lingrel, athletic director in 1946, remembered Walker and the tie. Lingrel called Walker, telling him to meet him and superintendent Wade E. Miller in Columbus. During a two-hour conversation, both Lingrel and Miller grew even more impressed with Walker.

Within the week a Western Union messenger came to Walker's apartment in Portsmouth, handing him a telegram. Before Walker could open it, the messenger smiled and told him he got the Middletown job.

Walker faced a lot of pressure in his first season in 1946-47. The previous two coaches had enjoyed tremendous success, taking the Middies to three straight state tournaments, winning two of them.

Walker had a seasoned group of players, including Shelby Linville who would later star for Adolph Rupp at the University of Kentucky. But the Middies endured a rough regular season, going 11-6 - the worst regular-season record in 11 years. Walker knew his team had to produce in the postseason. And his players responded.

After winning in double overtime over Dayton Northridge, the Middies reeled off six straight wins to capture their third state title. Walker's job was safe.

## It was news to city officials

Mayor Jim Kalb, Portsmouth City Council President Howard Baughman and Vice President Marty Mohr said Portsmouth City School officials told them nothing of the plan to build a downtown athletic complex. "Nobody has talked to me," Baughman said. "I heard Friday morning from a customer at Covert's (furniture store). That's all I know."

On Thursday, at the Portsmouth City Schools' board meeting, officials announced the school would be undertaking a feasibility study to develop the site of the former Portsmouth High School and its surrounding area into an athletic complex. The study would include education-related functions such as a central office and renovating the former gymnasium.

Athletic Director Tom Grashel said a donor has promised at least \$10 million for the complex. He would not name the donor. The school is in the process of finding an architect for the complex, which would include football and baseball fields. Its boundaries will stretch north from Gallia Street to Ninth Street and west from Waller to Findlay.

## Finally... An excuse to tear down those old stadiums

I knew the city would not let me down. There is too much history left showing down at River City. Now with a beautiful new sports complex going up where that old decrepit high school building stood, it is time to rid the area of its old sports connections. Those old stadiums will never match the clean open bleacher look of modern, high school ones. I hope the city remembers to rip-out those old tennis courts at Mound Park while they are at it. Come to think of it, why not flatten that ancient indian mound at the same time? If the city fathers will just burn all the historical photos in the library (before tearing it down) they will assure that the youth of the city will know that the city was never prosperous. Just kiddin again... perhaps....

## Paul Spears

Paul Spears, 87 Paul Kimble "Doc" Spears, 87, of Portsmouth, died Saturday, Dec. 2, 2006, at Wesley Village at Hill View Retirement Center. He was born in Portsmouth, Oct. 30, 1919, to the late Charles and Clara Lindsey Spears. He was preceded in death by his wife, Elizabeth Fender Spears. He is survived bysons, Randall and Scott Alan Spears; daughters, Sharon Bender, Kimberly Newman and Paula Burleson, of Columbus; and two granddaughters.

*Just a couple of weeks ago Jim Kegley sent a me a note that Paul was still living and requested that those who knew him should send a Christmas card. How ironic that I should have to rewrite with this sad news.*

Jim pointed out that Paul Spears is a special person, whom we were lucky to have had as a teacher and friend during our Highland School days. I was in Paul's homeroom in the sixth grade and agree with Jim. A very special teacher and coach has passed on. *Frank Hunter*



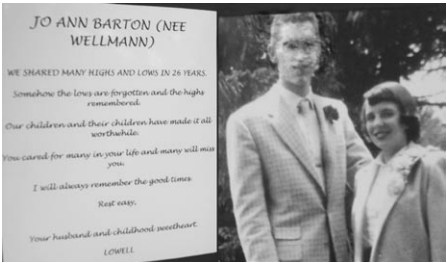
Linda Levine Zipes and Pat Scott Rudolph visit in Hilton Head this past summer



STILL GREAT FROM '58  
Cheryl Dresbach Fenneken, Carolyn Rayburn Bierley, Pat Scott Rudolph, Jane McGinnis Thomas, Ruth Mussetter Hutchinson, Sue Fuller Hollis, Sally Perry Duffey and Dot Thomas Kirsch



Pat Scott, Cheryl Dresbach and Linda Levine hostesses at Charity Horse Show 1958



Jo's Memorial Picture... with Lowell. It reads Jo Ann Barton (nee Wellmann) We shared many highs and lows in 26 years. Somehow the lows are forgotten and the highs remembered. Our Children have made it all worthwhile. You cared for many in your life and many will miss you. I will always remember the good times. Rest easy. Your husband and childhood sweetheart. Lowell.

## Jo Ann Barton Wellmann

Jo Ann died following a short illness in her home surrounded by her family on October 26th. She was 69. A memorial service was held at the American Legion in Warrenton, Missouri on October 28th with over 150 friends and family attendance.

She is survived by 6 children, 13 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren. She will be buried at Portsmouth in the springtime. Dates will be announced. She was a caring person and will be missed by all. *Lowell Barton*

## PHS Time Capsule

**The Portsmouth Times of June 2, 1954:**  
*'Mr. Chips' Closes 34-Year Teaching Career*  
*Peter Harris-Jones, PHS News Class Reporter*

Franklin B. McComb, whose name during 34 years has grown into an institution at Portsmouth High School, is retiring. This school year will be the last for "Fleety," as he is more commonly and affectionately called.

From YMCA work to athletics to social studies, Mr. McComb has lived a life of helping teen-age students and teaching them to understand the true values and fine ideals of life.

"This service has been a challenge to me," Mr. McComb said "and my greatest compensation is that I have helped. I believe we are put in this world to serve and the best subject to aid in all the world is youth."

The retiring teacher came to PHS in 1920 as an athletic coach. He remembers his arrival as one of the high points of his life, for he was accepted purely on the recommendation of one friend.

"This confidence made me realize the heart-warming gratification of true friendship," he said. "I feel it strengthened me to try to do the best possible job."

Before his arrival in Portsmouth, Mr. McComb had earned a bachelor of science degree from Alma College in Michigan and following his graduation in 1910 had gone into YMCA work.

He tells his students of an incident which formulated his philosophy of service and gave him a burning conviction to make good. The man offered to lend him money so he could complete his education. The only stipulation was this: "If you live, you can repay me; if you die, you can get along without the education."

During his six-year stint as athletic director at PHS, Mr. McComb also supervised the city playgrounds. "In those days," he recalled, "the playgrounds were under the board of education and Portsmouth used to have many more parks than it does now.

"One of the most urgent needs of the city today is to reinstate a fully supervised city parks program. Other cities have proved that such a program greatly helps to slash the delinquency problem."

From PHS athletic director "Coach" McComb became head of athletics of Portsmouth grade schools. It was during his directorship that the inter-school athletic competition began. During those early years he remembers that more emphasis was placed on all-around athletics rather than just on football, basketball and baseball. "I think even today we should emphasize a full athletic program," he said. "We certainly have a great potential."

As the years went by, teaching social science replaced athletic coaching for "Fleety," a nickname given him in his athletic days. The retiring teacher wistfully recalls the trying times of the depression and the "men of vision" who helped students through their many problems. He cites the depression difficulties as an example of the many experiences that enter a teacher's life. It's his firm conviction that a good teacher should learn the problems of each one of his students.

"In some cases a teacher can become a second 'parent' and try to help solve the obstacles that broken homes and unhappy marriages bring to a student who is unfortunate to be part of them," he said. Mr. McComb is a staunch believer that well balanced knowledge from home, church and school are the essentials of a firm foundation in life. He has tried to inject into his courses his philosophy and his knowledge gained from being both a parent and a counselor. Mr. McComb has one son, Charles, who is in the Navy.

Apart from his work in school along this line. Mr. McComb headed the DeMolay fraternity in Portsmouth. This organization was for boys between the ages of 16 and 22 and there are many of these who are grateful for personal and financial reasons that he found time to do this.

From these experiences, Mr. McComb draws the conclusion that "kids may be emotional, but they are true. When placed in an awkward situation, 99 out of 100 will come through and do the right thing. Students may make mistakes, but almost every one of them will realize his fault and come and apologize."

Mr. McComb has great faith in the modern generation. "We older ones," he said, "seem to forget at the sight of some teen-age scandal, that the crime the teenagers committed was not in any way new, but just a continuance of something that has gone on for generations and is being given notorious publicity. "Teenagers today are more frank and adopt a more realistic attitude toward life. In some respects, war has helped youth learn earlier the true sacredness of life. It has given them discipline and a certain trend of loyalty."

For his co-workers, he has nothing but praise. "The board of education and administration are very fortunate in having such a fine, morally conscious group. It also is to the great credit of the school administration that while I have been teaching here I never have felt any pressure to teach according to a certain method, or to slant a certain subject one way or the other."

The PHS faculty feels the same about him. They honored him today with an informal luncheon at Darone's at which they gave him a set of luggage and a free pass to all PHS events for the rest of his life. Mr. McComb likes to feel that his 34 years in Portsmouth have been a "wearing in instead of a wearing out." He can rest assured that his memory in the minds of his fellow teachers and in those of the students he has had never will wear out. Indeed, a spectator to the ceremony of "Fleety's" closing the door of Room 318 for the last time would be touched by the thought that those qualities immortalized by James Hilton in "Mr. Chips" are "Fleety's" too.

## Rocky Nelson

Local baseball great and Portsmouth native Rocky Nelson died Oct 31 at the age of 81 after a prolonged illness. A member of the 1960 World Champion Pittsburgh Pirates, Nelson hit a home run in the first inning of game seven. According to BaseballLibrary.com, Nelson, first name Glenn, is inducted into the "International League, the Ohio Baseball and the Canadian Baseball halls of fame."