

Whatever became of former principal Louis Bruno

By: LARAYNE WATTS and BOB BAILEY

Few can surpass the esteem and genuine affection held by scores of Raymond High School alumni for Louis Bruno, principal of RHS from 1931 to 1941. He would later go on to be elected by the voters of the State of Washington as their top educator, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, a position from which he retired in 1973.

Louis Bruno was born in Roslyn, Washington, in 1907. His parents were immigrants from Italy. His father was a coal miner. Not having an opportunity for an education themselves, they resolved that their only child would have one. Bruno graduated from Roslyn High School and later worked his way through college at Washington State University in Pullman.

In 1930 Bruno came to Raymond High School as a teacher and after one year was named principal of the high school, serving in that capacity from 1931 to 1941. During that time he was elected to a term as teacher member on the State Board of Education.

Times were tough in Raymond during the 1930s. The Great Depression saw the closing of the mills and timber camps. There was no unemployment compensation or welfare and a great many students stopped at the eighth grade, unable to afford high school. In high school many students were struggling to get by. Louis Bruno was compassionate and understanding. He knew most of the problems each student faced and spent a great deal of his time dealing with each student on a personal basis.

Bruno was remembered by some for maintaining strict discipline in the school, but did so without resentment, but rather pride from the students themselves. Alumnus Jim Weathers remembers, "Louis Bruno commanded respect. I remember when he was my teacher. He'd walk into the room and adjust the blind. If it was up, he'd put it down; if it was down, he put it up. Then he would go to his desk and rearrange papers that didn't need rearranging. All this time the kids would quiet down and not make a noise. He'd say, 'Students, I have to go to a (Chamber, coaches, Kiwanis, or whatever) meeting at lunch and I'm leaving you now. Study, talk, move around, do anything you want, but don't disturb anyone in or out of the room' He'd leave and that was that. No one got out of line or made any noises."

With the onslaught of World War II, Bruno was called to active duty and served four-and-a-half years in the Army Air Corps, being discharged with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. On his return from service he was named by State Superintendent Pearl Wanamaker as High School Supervisor for the state. He served in this capacity for one-and-a-half years before going to Pullman to accept the position of superintendent of schools there.

In 1962, voters of the state elected him the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. He served for three consecutive four-year terms, retiring in 1973.

During his tenure in office Bruno was active in state and national education councils. He served on the national board of the Council of Chief State School officials and was the only state superintendent named by President Lyndon Johnson to his National Advisory Committee for Disadvantaged Children.

In 1966, Mr. Bruno was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by Seattle Pacific College.

Bruno, who reached the age of 95 in the summer of 2002, now lives in a retirement complex, The firs, at Olympia. He is physically and mentally alert and has fantastic recall of incidents and individuals during his stay in Raymond, even though it has been 6 years since he left in 1941. His wife passed away in 1990. They have two children: a daughter in Portland, Oregon, and a son who lives just out of Grapeview, Washington.

When asked what he would tell graduating seniors, he was quick to say, "Master the basic rules of learning. Those basics are still fundamentally, reading, writing and arithmetic. The fundamentals have not really changed over the years, but if you have the fundamentals you can cope with change."



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