

EDUCATION

District honors 21 retirees

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CLINTON -- Principals, teachers, cooks and bus drivers -- an assortment of people who dedicated years were all honored for their commitment to the Clinton School District on Monday. In all, Superintendent Deb Olson praised 21 who are off to varied new commitments in retirement.

"Each person that you see standing here has had a tremendous impact on our children through their service," Olson said Monday during her district's Honor Ceremony at Bluff Elementary School. "They gave it their all, all for the betterment of others.

Being in education is not a job. It is a vocation, it is a way of life." Attendees were treated to free food and drink accompanied by admiration for one another and from those who are still working in the school system.

Many of them have devoted decades to the district in numerous capacities.

Ruby Van Pelt, 87, was among the oldest retiring from her role as a cafeteria lady, capping off over four decades of work. Were it not for an injury she suffered last year, Van Pelt said she would still work for the district. Even so, she plans to continue volunteering at Bluff Elementary, where she has walked to and from since she lost the ability to drive. "I'd be working yet," said Van Pelt, who plans to spend more time with her grandchildren. "I've made so many good friends working here." Others joining her were Orville Buikema, Geraldine Clausen-Butz, Rose Miller and William Tompkins from the transportation department; counselors Jayne Dierickx and Sally Rutz; maintenance men Tom Otto and Dale Holesinger; food service workers Shelba VanHorn, Cheryl McNulty and Judy Luett; nurse Jane Elsasser; teachers Julie Eyskens, Tom McCormick, RoseAnn Robe and Dianne Guntzel; crossing guard James Richmond; principals Bev Goerdt and Bonnie Freitag; and human resources director Jess Terrell.

The last name -- Terrell -- brought Olson to tears hours later when she presented the 68-year-old with a special plaque of recognition at CCSD's regular board meeting.

"The only love that surpasses that of education and students is the love for his family," Olson said.

"I'm a better person and a better educator for having Jess Terrell guide and mentor me." Terrell spent 14 years overseeing district personnel decisions. Before that he worked 31 years in Ottumwa, working his way up from elementary teacher to principal to fine arts director and finally HR director. In total, he spent 45 years working in education, earning him praise from several administrators and board members Monday.

"You are a professional's professional, you are a colleague, and you are a friend," said John Jorgenson, curriculum director. "I couldn't be more proud to call you my friend." The board even surprised Terrell by bringing his family in for the celebration. Since he was hired by the district in 2000, Terrell said he has lived hours apart from his kin, which resides in southern Iowa.

For that reason, he said it was time for him to leave CCSD. Terrell started working when he was 21 years old. He said the field has evolved tremendously.

"It's something that I will miss dearly," Terrell said.

"I've been one of those people fortunate enough to never have a job I didn't love. I never had a day that I regretted getting up.

"My thoughts have always been about is it good for kids. It gives me strength in what I do," he added. "Over the years of course there's been many changes... I think you operate out of ignorance but you're doing the best you can at the time. Each year and decade you learn to grow and make changes." As with fellow retirees, Terrell received a standing ovation from his peers.



Clinton School District Superintendent Deb Olson (right) honors 21 retirees of her school district during a special Honor Ceremony on Monday at Bluff Elementary School.