

Introduction of Superintendent-Elect
with History of BVA Superintendents
Rostraver Chamber of Commerce Luncheon
The Willow Room
Rostraver Township, Pennsylvania
July 26, 2012

This is history I have lived:

(Editors' note: This is a review of all five superintendents of the Belle Vernon Area School District from 1965-2012.)

Thomas J. Gilmer (1965-1977), a Webster native, Gilmer was a Rostraver elementary teacher who transferred his father's political know-how to parlay an elementary principalship and soon became assistant superintendent in 1959 to E.F. Carter, long time superintendent of Rostraver Township School District. Gilmer became superintendent of Rostraver in 1960 and, upon the Rostraver merger with the Bellmarette School District, Gilmer was selected superintendent of BVA and oversaw the construction of Belle Vernon Area High School in 1966. A hotly contested school board race in 1977 saw incumbents defeated on the slogan, "New Superintendent – New School Policies." Mr. Gilmer did have presence and commanded attention from school district staff and conceived the idea of a Belle Vernon Area School District.

Gregory Caruso (1978-2000), an English teacher from 1960 beginning his career at old Bellmar High School until 1976 when he was elevated to High School principal and I was named his assistant after teaching history for six years at Monongahela High. Mr. Caruso was the substitute superintendent upon the sick leave departure of Mr. Gilmer in 1978 until finally being named superintendent in 1979 after a long, legal battle over paying the previous superintendent while on sick leave. Mr. Caruso was able to win four more terms as superintendent at the expense of passing a few years after retiring from the position in June 2000. Mr. Caruso was focused on the finances of the school district, keeping tax hikes to a minimum. I watched the position of superintendent and the process of securing his contract renewals rob him of his physical and emotional well being.

The third superintendent was selected out of the West Virginia county system of schools. **Dr. Charles Chandler** (2000-2003) operated Belle Vernon Area as if it were a county school district without grasping the difference in how to run a local school district that was much more scrutinized by folks on the scene. Financial problems began to be to be an issue for the District due to the economic climate. Appointed to a five-year contract, he departed after three years and was succeeded by Assistant Superintendent **Robert Nagy** (2003-2008), a product of the BVA school system. The District was in financial crisis when Nagy arrived. He set out to cut spending drastically, which he did. Personal issues caused his sudden retirement resignation in October 2008 shortly after receiving a five-year contract. I was called at my home at 10:30 in the evening on the third Monday of that October board meeting and was asked to assume the position of acting assistant superintendent.

In November, 2008, **Stephen V. Russell** (2008-2012) was named substitute superintendent for the remainder of the 2008-2009 school year. The following month, in December, the board initially offered a five-year contract which was reduced to three years with my concurrence. After 33 years as a principal and six as a teacher, retirement was beginning to interest me because Father Time was telling me to slow down. I announced, on December 8, 2011 that I would not seek another term and would retire at the end of my contract. Working with the board to find the sixth BVA superintendent, the board enthusiastically named Dr. John Wilkinson in March of this year. I concurred with the Board's choice and now it is my pleasure to give to you John Wilkinson.