

Dan Severson, "It's been a Great Ride"

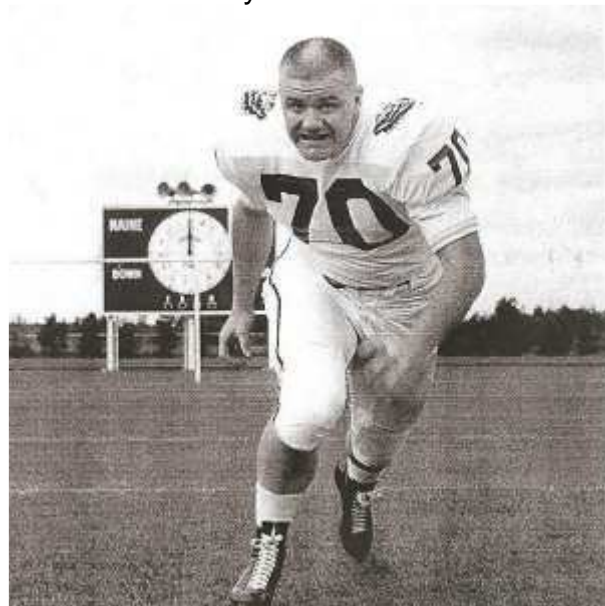
Dan Severson is retiring from Cambridge Central School this year after 21 years of service, first for 7 years as a science teacher, then 13 years as principal and finally this last year as superintendent. Being able to give back to the school and community that raised and shaped him has been, in Dan's words, "a great ride".



Dan was born on April 6, 1942 in Mary McClellan Hospital the son of John and Anne Severson. His family lived at 110 West Main Street and ran a bakery at 42 West Main. His childhood playmates included his brother, Mike, Tom Canzeri, Billy Potvin, Glenn Davis, Mick Kent, Charles Clark, Carmen Olf, and Charles Cole.

Dan was a diligent, though not stellar, student. During one of his less attentive moments, Dan recalls sitting in Charlotte Gottry's Latin class counting the glass bricks in the wall. He was an active teenager (some might even say "wild") but never in school. Besides not wanting to let down his teachers, he knew he'd be in even more trouble at home. He recalls Maurice "Okie" O'Connor, John Herbert, and Ken Wilbur as teachers who helped guide and educate him.

Dan received an exceptional score on the National Merit Scholarship test, prompting Principal Charlie Bowler to take a personal interest in helping Dan get into the right college. Charlie drove Dan to the University of Maine where he scheduled an interview with the Director of Admissions and the football coach. Next, Charlie got an interview for Dan at Syracuse University with Coach Ben Schwartzwalder and the great Ernie Davis. SU wouldn't allow Dan to attend the College of Forestry because it would interfere with football practice. So, upon graduation from CCS in 1960 Dan enrolled on a football scholarship at University of Maine where he co-captained the team in his senior year.



Dan was a member of Kappa Sigma

fraternity, which he proudly defines as a real-life Animal House. He returned to Cambridge quite a bit during the school year in spite of the 8-hour drive. During the summer Dan worked for the county along with Bob Hamilton. They spent many an hour swinging hand scythes to clear brush along the edge of the roads. Summers were very short because he had to return for football practice.

Dan's college career consisted of a mix of college of forestry, college of arts & sciences, and college of education. In 1964 Dan graduated with a teaching degree looking for a career as a science teacher. Since the college of forestry was a land grant college, Dan had to enroll in ROTC and became a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army upon graduation.



Dan's army career lasted 23 years and spanned many areas including infantry, paratrooper, pathfinder, and ranger. He was a Lieutenant in command of a platoon from the 173rd airborne brigades in Vietnam. After signing for an extended Vietnam tour in 1967, Dan was seriously wounded attacking a hill during the start of the Tet offensive. He was evacuated by helicopter and spent over one year in a hospital. He had a collapsed right lung, punctured internal organs and lost a muscle off his leg. Following stays in six different hospitals, including Walter Reed, Dan returned to active duty.

Dan received numerous awards and decorations for his military service, including the Distinguished Service Cross for Valor, the second highest

award bestowed by the Army. He has 3 Bronze Stars for valor, an Army commendation, and 2 Purple hearts. Dan stood with the Army photographer who took the accompanying photo of the first fallen member of his unit in Vietnam.

The photo was featured in national media as they tried to show the other, more personal side of the unpopular war.

In April 1969 Dan married Polly Penland, a Georgia girl he met when he was an instructor at the US Army mountain ranger camp. Their daughter, Jennifer, lives in Pennsylvania



and is married to an FBI agent.

They have a grand-daughter, Charlotte. Dan and Polly's son, Eric, lives in Albany where he makes hi-tech fire extinguishers. Eric married Katy, an Albany girl.

When Dan retired from the Army in 1988 he wanted to return to Cambridge. His good friend, Howard Romack, helped secure him a position as earth science teacher. While Dan was in the Army he was able to obtain his high school administration certificate at the University of Maine, where he coached football for 2 years. When the CCS high school principal job became available in 1996, Dan was the right man in the right spot at the right time.

Like so many who grew up in Cambridge and moved away, Dan never considered any place home except Cambridge. During his long Army career, Dan always knew that he was "eventually going home to Cambridge". The community and teachers of his youth had helped form him and he was proud to be able to return the favor to the next generations. He recalls that the community "depended on me" and that his parents "expected him to behave", two virtues that he still finds true in Cambridge today.

Dan's been involved on a daily basis with the CCS students, in the classroom, in the principal's office and on the football field where he serves as an unpaid assistant coach. When asked what accomplishments he's most proud of he immediately points out CCS's recent achievement as one of the Top Ten High-Performing high schools in NYS. He also beams when telling of CCS's 12th place academic ranking among all Capital District schools, large and small. He proudly tells of CCS's 22nd ranking of 550 NYS schools in Regents graduation rate. With equal pride, he recalls CCS's two football state championships in 1992 and 1999.

He calls his retirement a "payback period for Polly". Cambridge and CCS have taken a lot of commitment and he feels it's now time to dote on his wife. Dan has provided "service out of a feeling of debt and a sense of community". Dan Severson has given a lot to his community, his country, and his school. A grateful community says Thanks and hopes he enjoys his retirement.

Ken Gottry, '68

President CCS Alumni Association

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