

Wapakoneta's Joe Carter instituted a lot of changes at Centennial Elementary School during his tenure at the building. He worked hard to meld teacher strengths with the services the children needed. Starla Kent, at right, helps a student with a spelling assignment.

Photo provided



## Long-time principal started with the birth of Centennial

By MEGAN VEIT  
News Correspondent

The year was 1948. Wapakoneta was building a new elementary school. To get the job done, John A. Johnson, one of the nation's largest contractors, had been called to town.

A young man, a college freshman, was spending summer break at Centennial Elementary's construction site. That young man was Joseph Carter.

John A. Johnson hired Carter for a summer of double duty. By day, he was a construction hand. By evening, he kept records and books. When construction was completed and it was time to ensure that there had been no waste of materials,

Carter was put to work. "I counted every brick in that school," Carter said with a smile and a shake of his head.

He counted the building's bricks. He counted the remaining bricks. He cross-referenced. Then, it was time to count tiles.

When Virgil Lee, a fellow worker, asked him why he didn't stay on and work at the new school, Carter gave a small laugh. He replied that he was studying business, readying himself to be a chief

executive officer. Carter later changed his mind. Seventeen years after working on the construction site, Carter entered the principal's office of Centennial Elementary — a position he retained for 24 years.

While studying business, Carter took an additional semester and graduated prepared to teach high school business. He mastered shorthand, typing, sales and business law

among others. "I thought I'd have two items to go with," Carter said.

He was keeping his options open, a mindset that served him well in his career as an educator.

A Wapakoneta native, he returned to his hometown and began teaching at Wapakoneta High School.

During the years, he married his sweetheart, Ruth. She also was a teacher, teaching government in the Wapakoneta City School District for 30 years. She graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Dayton and a master's degree from Wright State

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### Fast facts

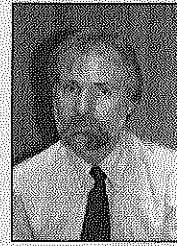
Centennial Elementary School was built in 1949.

The first contract to build the school was for \$550,000 and included six wings on the building. The second general contractor John A. Johnson accepted the bid for \$550,000 with five wings.

The design of the building was to bring the outdoors inside with many windows for viewing. The classrooms were to be larger so the students could do activities in the classroom.

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14 years. A portion of the history he holds dear are the "Joe Carter stories" he has heard not only at work but out in the community.



Newland 90s



Newland

Carter was Centennial's principal for 24 years beginning in 1965, making a switch that he described as unexpected in a move from high school business teacher to elementary school principal.

He has the longest tenure in the elementary's history, and he had a passion for student achievement that Newland said he would be honored to be compared to.

"A lot of the stories I've heard about Carter have to do with his temperament," Newland said. "He handled things gracefully. He used intuition. He was a gentleman."

The two have become acquaintances, stopping to say hello at restaurants and community functions.

Part of that history came to Wapakoneta Elementary School in boxes, alongside Newland's megaphone and office supplies while the rest has gone onto safekeeping with the school district's records.

Though the wings of Centennial are closed, Newland does his best to bring its spirit to his new school.

This will be Newland's 27th year as a principal. Like Carter, he was a bit hesitant to make the switch at Big Walnut Elementary in Sunbury. At that time, he was a sixth-grade teacher. While he took over as

principal, his predecessor returned to her position as teacher.

While Newland is not a Wapakoneta native, he has strong family ties. His father was a graduate of Blume High School, while his mother grew up near St. Johns.

Fourteen years ago, Newland was looking at principal positions throughout central Ohio, but he said his final decision was made "irrespective of ties family-wise."

"It looked like a good match" for his family and two young children, Newland said.

Keith Newland graduated from the University of Cincinnati this summer while his sister, Michelle, still attends.

Newland believes their time in Wapakoneta City Schools prepared them well and that the technology and changes that come with the new elementary will continue to attract teachers and students "for the next 50 years."

"The Wapak school district is already a good place to teach, learn and grow," Newland said.

Newland said he feels that his role as a principal is to touch on all sides of education.

"I still hold the idea that I could go back to teaching," said Newland, who noted he sees his position as co-principal of Wapakoneta Elementary School as a way to teach students, teachers and their parents to enhance their education.

Newland spends his days in the Administrative Complex, where he and co-principal Mark Selvaggio are preparing their offices and themselves for the September start of classes. In the meantime, the halls are filled with summer health and summer school students, construction workers and teachers.

Memories are already in the making.

**"The Wapak school district is already a good place to teach, learn and grow."**  
— Wes Newland

### Principals

Catherine Culletin

Kenneth Dahill

Joseph Carter

Gregg Douglas

Linda Moser

Wes Newland

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Centennial Elementary School Principal Wes Newland helps cut the ribbon on the new playground equipment at the school. Members of the cafeteria staff pose for a photograph during Joe Carter's tenure at Centennial Elementary School. An annual event was the spring outdoor festival for the children. Jann Klopfenstein teaches her students a lesson during classtime.

Photo provided

## Birth From Page 3C

University.

The couple also owned and operated Carter's General Merchandising, an office machinery and general store for 25 years.

His wife, Ruth, also served for years on Wapakoneta City Council, representing the city's 1st Ward. She also was a 15-year member of the Wapakoneta Area Economic Development Council, a previous officer holder in the Republican Party and is associated with the Women's Club, Buckeye Farm Antiques and the Retired Teacher's Association. Carter attends St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Wapakoneta.

During his years at Wapakoneta High School, he helped bring honors to the Future Business Leaders of America and helped students travel to competitions across the country.

He was ready for a change.

"I applied for high school principal and later I was appointed to Centennial — out of the clear

blue sky," Carter said.

He had never considered elementary education. To keep his options open, he took the position with a one-year contract.

"I had the option at the end of the first year and at the end of the second then I had to make a decision," Carter said.

After the challenge of the first year, Carter felt ready for anything.

Carter was ushered into Centennial in a whirlwind of change. He was charged with introducing the economy phonics program as well as changing the curriculum for three of the core subjects — science, math and social studies.

He thanks the teachers for the successful transition. Centennial Elementary "consistently had a good staff from beginning to the very end due to the smaller community and the pride it takes in its work," Carter said.

The pressures such a change out them under could never be repeated.

New regulations were put into place allowing only one large change to the school curriculum per year, allowing teachers to adapt.

By this standard, Carter and the team of teachers at Centennial did for years of work in his first year as principal.

Carter had a strong focus on the school systems' success. At that time, the principal of Centennial also covered learning facilities at Blume, the Women's Club, First Methodist Church and English Lutheran Church. This meant that he was responsible for 1,100 students until Northridge was opened in 1968.

For Carter, this meant taking on long hours to make up for his "green horn" status. Each Sunday, Carter went into his office.

He pulled out file after file, comparing students' performances with their ability. His mission quickly became eliminating underperformance.

"You could see them light up when they comprehended something," Carter said.

He had his bearings in elementary education, and over the next two decades he established a standard that Centennial Elementary's principals are still being measured by.

Wes Newland, Centennial's final principal, has heard "Joe Carter stories" and said that he hopes to match the intuitive nature and the positive way he approach situations in his school.

Carter has been pleased to watch Centennial Elementary's progress since his retirement and Wapakoneta City School's potential for continued growth. With all of the students in close proximity, he said, "allows teachers to work more closely together."

"Principals are now in the same unit and can work more closely with the students and the staff," Carter said. "It's a blessing."

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