

Reno High School Alumni Association

The Story



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Foreword- High school age students in the Reno area first were recognized as a group in 1879, when they were accorded space apart from younger students, on the upper level of the new Central School at Fifth and West streets in the northwestern part of the city's downtown district.

That imposing structure was enlarged a short time later to accommodate a fast-growing student population, but served for only 31 years before it was razed in 1911 to make room for an even larger facility on the same site.

The first building to bear the name **Reno High School** opened December 2, 1912. It was to be home to the upper grades of public education until the fall of 1951, when the current school was placed into service, across the Truckee River to the South, on Booth Street at Foster Drive.

A continuing role in education was assigned to the earlier building, which became known as Central Intermediate School, and which proved adequate until a major fire struck in 1967 and the property was abandoned by the Washoe County School District.

Forty-eight years after the current high school went into service, another brick structure rose on the front lawn, facing Booth Street.

It was no coincidence that its facade bore a striking resemblance to the earlier **Reno High School** dedicated in 1912. And, displayed proudly in the lobby as the first object seen by visitors was an imposing green bell, rescued from obscurity in a school district warehouse and refurbished at the Nevada State Railroad Museum in Carson City.

More than 100 years earlier, it had hung in the belfry of the city's bright, new **Central School** at Fifth and West streets.

The following history is dedicated to the students whose enthusiasm resounded through those three structures as they prepared for "the real world," and went on to make their marks.

- Len E. Crocker, RHS Class of 1943.

A **Reno High School Alumni Association** was a dream of **Dr. Bud L. Beasley**, an energetic and persuasive lover of life whose 65 years as a Nevada educator included 33 years in "Husky Land" as a teacher, coach and counselor.

His dedication to the young men and women who studied with him showed in many ways, from earnest life counseling to the scrapbooks he created during all those years with news clippings and photos telling of their accomplishments.

That dedication began the moment he graduated from the University of Nevada in 1934 and accepted a teaching assignment in rural Nevada's Battle Mountain. It ended only with his death on July 17, 2004, in his Reno home at the age of 93.

The Reno High School Alumni Association

Chapter 1 - The Early Years

It had its roots in Santa Cruz, CA, where a transplanted New Mexico boy named Bud L Beasley completed his public school education and was awarded an athletic scholarship on the other side of the Sierra Nevada, at the University of Nevada, in Reno. "Beas" knew the importance of their alumni group there to his classmates in Santa Cruz, and almost the moment he began teaching at Reno High School in 1936, he knew that Reno High School needed a similar organization. Little did he realize how long it would take or how successful his years-long drive would become.

"The Coach" became a familiar face at Reno High School class reunions, in later years even managing to attend more than one on the same day, when chance scheduled them that way.

At each of them, he preached his message: "we need an alumni association." He did more than that, however, and carried that message to his fellow faculty members at the school and to members of the Washoe County School Board. On Nov. 22, 1994, Beasley again appeared before that board, backed by the district's head of properties Dale Sanderson. Also there were Architect Tom Casazza, who with his father Ralph Casazza had developed a provisional plan for an alumni building; plus RHS Class of 1943 graduates Len Crocker and Joe Elcano, who attended at Beasley's invitation.

Board members approved the concept of an alumni center on the school's campus, and directed Beasley and Sanderson to follow through with school officials. The following week, the same alumni group, joined by Architect Ralph Casazza, toured the school grounds with Principal Pat Rogan. The latter liked the idea but offered the thought that an addition to the existing school building might be better than the free-standing structure proposed by Beasley and the group. In the end, a grassed area between the northeast corner of the school and Booth Street was chosen as the "prime" location for the proposed center.

Nearly another year elapsed, with Dr. Beasley regularly attending class reunions and delivering his message, "We need an alumni association and an alumni center." Then "Beas" made his pitch to a reunion of the class of 1955, offering the idea of life membership in an organization that really did not exist at the time.

The day after that affair, Beasley appeared at the home of Len Crocker, with whom he had worked closely for a number of years while the educator coached RHS baseball and Crocker covered same as a sports writer at the city's morning newspaper, the Nevada State Journal.

At the Crocker home, Beasley dumped more than \$3,000 on the dining room table and instructed, "There you go, Croc. Now **DO** something with it!"

That finally got the wheels turning. Crocker made several telephone calls, and on Oct. 3, Attorney Frank Petersen's office was the scene of a meeting, with Crocker as provisional chair. Also on hand were Beasley; the two Casazzas; Elcano and Rose Meredith from the Class of '43; Albert B. Solari, 1938; and 1955 graduate Joseph R. Granata. Meanwhile, Crocker had been assured of the support of new high school Principal Janet Ross.

Beasley noted that the "new" Reno High School has been opened for the fall semester of 1951, replacing an earlier structure at Fifth and West Streets in the northwest part of the city. He detailed his thinking about the need for a center as a storehouse for records and artifacts from the earlier Reno High School building, dating back to the 1920s and nearly "lost in the shuffle" when that structure was converted to a middle school.

Before the evening was over Beasley, Granata and Crocker had agreed to become signers on a bank account to house the funds from Granata's class reunion, and Petersen was to begin the task of securing Internal Revenue Service non-profit status for a formal association. The group gave informal approval to the Casazza building plans, and an Oct. 26 meeting was scheduled in the high school library, where members of the charter group would present their ideas on the needs and uses for the proposed Alumni Center.

Leaders chosen formally by the 14 individuals at the Oct. 26 meeting were headed by Len Crocker as President; Joe Granata as Vice President, Joe Elcano as Secretary; James Binns as Treasurer; and Bud Beasley, Rose Meredith, Al Solari, and David Minedew as Trustees. Frank Petersen was confirmed as Counsel.

Prior to the next Board meeting, on Nov. 2, Petersen filed incorporation papers with the Nevada Secretary of State, with Beasley, Granata and Crocker as charter Trustees. Post Office Box 5807 had been rented at the USPS Washington Station. Crocker agreed to contact all members of the Class of 1955 who had "paid dues," explaining that no association actually had existed when they did so, and offering to return any funds collected at the time. Not one person asked for a refund.

At the Association's first "general membership" meeting, held Nov. 30 in the high school library, a tentative committee structure was announced and agreement was reached to stage a major marketing event in the form of an all-class reunion picnic in August of 1996, at Rancho San Rafael Regional Park. It would be based on an earlier and highly successful "Old Reno High School" picnic held at the same location.

A March 4, 1996 Treasurer's Report showed a bank balance of \$1,955.73, which increased by the end of that month to \$2,217.88.

"The purpose of this non-profit association shall be to identify and properly recognize the accomplishments of the alumni, students, faculty and staff of Reno High School. Equal attention shall be paid to the academic and non-academic phases of high school activities, in order that a well-balanced picture may be presented to the public. A permanent record of such accomplishments shall be made in a Reno High School Alumni Museum/Information Center, created and operated by the Association.

"-Adopted 14 March 1996. "

On March 14, Architect Tom Casazza reported that the firm of Casazza, Peetz and Hancock would provide at no charge a recommended floor plan and rough exterior sketch for use in publicity and fund raising. Details necessary to complete the application for federal tax-exempt status were ready for CPA Albert Carlidge to process.

A membership report showed 34 paid members of the association. Boyd E. Kelly of Carrollton, TX, member of the Class of 1955, had contributed \$1,000 and classmate Leonard Mardian of Las Vegas had added \$500.

Supporting level members who provided \$100 each to help finance the association were Spiros Anastassatos, Bud L. Beasley, James Binns, Nancy Boston, Tom Burns, Earl W. Cooper, Marlene Belli Coyle, Len E. Crocker, Carolyn H. Foote, Joseph R. Granata, Betty A. Hall, Joseph K. Humphrey, David Jamieson, Marcella Kozak Kess, Bob Kuchler, Janet Lagomarsino Lerude, Warren R. Lerude, Sharon A. Marks, Rose N. Meredith, David J. Minedew, Ralph J. Ortiz, E. Grant Rees, Madelyn T. Scott, Cynthia A. Smith, Glenda Humphreys Ternullo, Donald J. Watts, Paula Martin Yturbide and Tom Yturbide.

Nancy Baglin, Susan Weber Mardian and Ida M. Trout Shafer had enrolled as annual members.

The following month, the treasury was swelled by \$1,040 carried over from the "Old Reno High School 1991 Picnic" and its committee members Jim and Marjean Binns, Marilyn Melton and Joanne Kimball agreed to work on the Aug. 18 all-class reunion picnic to be staged by the association at Rancho San Rafael Park.

May 21 was marked by adoption of the association's first bylaws, with trustees to serve three-year terms and one-third of the board to be chosen each year, to provide continuity. The bylaws included addition of a vice president to the list of officers, who were to serve one year terms, Jan. 1 -Dec. 31.

Attorney Steven Walther joined the administrative group in September as co-counsel with Frank Petersen, and RHS Principal Janet Ross announced that the school's Site Committee had added its approval to Alumni Center plans. The following month, the board approved amended Articles of Incorporation created by Walther. Henry A. Garell, Joanne F. Petre, Richard B. Rowley, John P. Sande III and John H. Sutton were added to the Board of Trustees. Joe Granata agreed to serve as vice president through the end of the year and Joanne Petre assumed the post of Secretary.

Terms of office assigned by lot in conjunction with the amended Articles of Incorporation were:

Three years until Dec. 31, 1999 and eligible for election to two additional three-year terms - Henry A. Garell, David J. Minedew, Joanne F. Petre and Richard B. Rowley.

Two years until Dec. 31, 1998 and eligible for election to three additional three-year terms - Joseph R. Granata, Rose N. Meredith, John P. Sande III and Albert B. Solari.

One year until Dec. 31, 1997 and eligible for election to three additional three-year terms - Bud L. Beasley, James Binns, Len E. Crocker, Joe F. Elcano Jr. and John H. Sutton.

The Association achieved a place to call "home" on March 10, 1997, when an offer by Trustee Albert B. Solari of a rent-free office at 70 Linden St. was accepted, and the Board held its first meeting in its new quarters on the 27th of that month.

A highlight of the session was announcement by President Len Crocker of an offer of \$400,000 for construction of the Alumni Center, in return for placing the donor's name on the front of the building. At the request of the individual who made the offer, Crocker declined to make an identification.

At the April 17 Board meeting, businessman **Link Piazzo** was identified by the chair as the person who made the offer of \$400,000 for an Alumni Center building. Trustee Rowley expressed concern that placing one name on the face of the building would deter other potential donors, and following extensive discussion, the matter was tabled until the next meeting of the Board.

The offer was accepted during a special meeting of the Board on April 24, with "Yes" votes cast by Trustees Crocker, Petre, Beasley, Elcano, Garell, Meredith, Minedew, Solari and Sutton and "no" by Trustee Rowley. Trustee Binns was excused due to scheduled eye surgery on this date and Trustees Sande and Granata were absent. May 26, the Washoe County School Board approved plans for an on-campus Alumni Center, including Link Piazzo's name on the facade.

In August, the Board of Trustees approved creation of a Professional Advisory Board, comprising former Reno High School students, faculty and staff and to number not more than 30 persons. In October, purchase of a computer (through the Washoe County School District) and installation of an office telephone put the group on more of a business-like basis and at month's end the member/contributor list had climbed to 187 persons and the bank balance stood at \$12,501.88. Charter Counsel Frank Petersen resigned from the board, and as resident agent. President Crocker assumed the latter position.

Trustee Richard Rowley resigned from the board, and Greg Ferraro was added in November to fill the vacancy. Businessman Link Piazzo expressed impatience with lack of progress due to legal problems with use of school property, but in a special meeting with State Sen. William Raggio and Board Members Crocker and Sande, withdrew a Dec. 31 deadline for an agreement and agreed to extend his financial offer "for a reasonable time."

As the year 1997 ended, the Association had a net worth of \$14,386.23. The year 1998 began on a high note, as the Association's office was organized physically and the computer installed and tested, but the real highlight was addition of Attorney John Frankovich, a 1964 graduate, as Associate Counsel with Steve Walther. By year's end, Frankovich had assumed sole responsibility as Counsel.

It was he who waded through a maze of legal regulations to forge an agreement with the Board of the Washoe County School District that enabled the Alumni to construct an Association-owned Alumni Center on District property leased for a 25-year period and renewable then for an additional 25 years.

Then came a landmark year in the Association's history, as a contract for an on-campus Alumni Center was signed with General Contractor Q&D Construction and its head, RHS graduate Norman Dianda. A symbolic ground-breaking ceremony was held on Labor Day, work began the following week, and in less than 120 days, the structure was complete - including a facade that mirrored an earlier RHS building at Fifth and West streets in Northwest Reno.

Founding President Len Crocker chaired his final meeting just prior to Christmas, as the first official activity in the building, and new President Joe Granata assumed the leadership post as the year 2000 began. Before that year had ended, RHS Principal Janet Ross reported to the School Board that that the new Center had become an important asset to the school for special meetings, student testing, Honor Society inductions and the like. At her suggestion, the Board waived the annual lease fee from the Alumni Association

The Association was "home!"

Chapter 2-A Home of Our Own

The Association began the year 2000 in its brand new home, the \$400,000-plus Link Piazza Alumni Center on the Booth Street campus, and under the direction of its second President, 1955 graduate **Joseph R. Granata**.

General Contractor Q&D Construction Co. had brought the building from a Labor Day groundbreaking to the Board's last meeting of 1999 in less than 120 days, led by its president, 1957 Reno High graduate **Norman Dianda**.

The business office was furnished by Machabee Office Environments, thanks to 1958 graduate **Gary Machabee**.

More than 40 upholstered meeting room chairs obtained through the University of Nevada's Continuing Education Department brought with them an unexpected bonus when their covering was nearly a perfect match for the Center's carpeting.

The working kitchen included its major appliances with the construction planning, then Association members began to add donation of items such as an overhead light/ exhaust fan for the electric range, a microwave oven, coffee pot, tea kettle, and table ware.

When the Board learned through Trustee **Ralph Casazza** that a major retailer in the area was upgrading its display floor, ten refurbished display cases were purchased and fitted with wheels for mobility, and the move really was on to make "home" look like a working headquarters. Memorabilia was chosen nearly at random for display, to have "something to look at" in nine of those cases. The other case, located at the left rear of the Center's major room, was dedicated to items telling the story of major contributor **Link Piazza**, whose \$400,000 support made possible construction of the Association's permanent quarters.

Piazza's likeness already greeted visitors from a bronze plaque in the lobby. Now, photos depicting his business career and his World War II flying accomplishments as a B-25 fighter-bomber pilot also were to be seen - including his Distinguished Flying Cross and other actual medals.

A large group photos of graduating classes from the "new" Reno High School, plus literally dozens of dust-gathering trophies, were rescued from near-anonymity in the school's lower levels, thanks largely to Maintenance head **Kaz "Kookie" Rekucki**, who later was voted Life Membership by the Association Board for his contributions.

The trophies were sorted for retention and display and the photos immediately became a major attraction for visitors, who could be seen examining them closely and pointing out to children or spouses, "See, there I am!" Fine tuning was to come, but it was a major start to "setting up housekeeping."

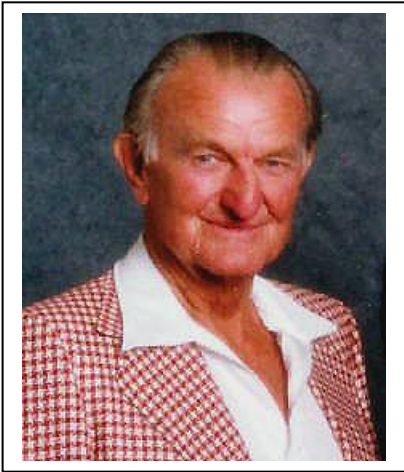
Chapter 3 - The People behind the Association

A grand new adventure had a quiet beginning on Oct. 3, 1995, when eight alumni of Reno High School gathered in the Reno law offices of 1937 graduate Frank R. Petersen to follow the wishes of long-time teacher and coach Bud L. Beasley and "do something" with more than \$3,800 he had collected shortly before, during a reunion of the Class of 1955.

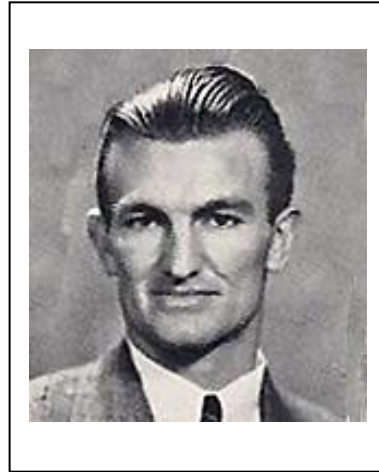
On hand, in addition to 1939 graduate Petersen, were: Albert Solari, Class of 1939; 1943's Len E. Crocker, Rose (Nannini) Meredith and Joe F. Elcano Jr.; Joseph R. Granata from that fund-producing Class of '55; and the father/son architect team of Ralph A. Casazza, 1946, and Thomas Casazza, 1973. Petersen agreed to draw papers to create a non-profit corporation, and Beasley, Crocker and Granata were named signers on an organizational bank account.

Crocker, who had been chosen as provisional chair during that first gathering, was named President during the Oct. 26 "general meeting" that followed. Other officers of the fledgling group were: Elcano as Secretary; 1950 graduate James Binns, Treasurer; and Beasley, Granata, Meredith, Solari and the Class of 1961's David Minedew as Trustees. Petersen was confirmed as Counsel and Resident Agent.

RHSAA Leaders



2002/Ross Photo



U. of Nevada 1934

Bud L. Beasley. Member #1, Life Member #56 (deceased 17 July 2004)

Association service: 1995, Co-founder; 1995-2003, Trustee; 2003 Honorary Trustee.

Born: 8 December 1910, Melrose, NM.

Education: Santa Cruz, CA High School, 1930; University of Nevada, 1930- 34, B.A. Education, Master of Education, PhD Education.

Career: Teacher: 1934 Battle Mountain; 1935 Northside Jr. High School; 1936-78 Reno High School; 1978-91 Special Education Washoe County Schools; 1968-2002 Washoe High School. Nevada record 68 years as a teacher. Reno High School

Athletic Complex named for him in 2003.

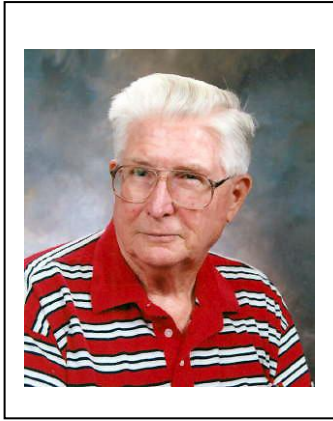
As a professional baseball player, pitched several years in Class "AAA" Pacific Coast League in Seattle, WA and Sacramento, CA concurrent to teaching career.

Personal: Married nearly 64 years to Nellie Meyers, Reno. Raised 17 adopted children.

Community: Reno Kiwanis Club 63-year member; recognized as inspiration for the Reno High School Alumni Association, where a cushioned armchair in the Alumni Center/Museum was reserved for him during meetings (and from which he traditionally entered the motion for adjournment of Association meetings) and which now bears a bronze plaque with his name.

Professional: Received educator recognition from four Presidents of the United States and two Nevada Governors; Nevada Teacher of the Year (Phi Delta Kappa Fraternity); Kiwanis Nevada-California-Hawaii District Educator of the Year.

RHSAA Leaders



2006



Class of 1943

Lenley E. "Len" Crocker, Member #2, Life Member #46

Association service: 1995, Co-founder; 1995-99, President; 2000-2006, Vice President/Membership (mandatory retirement after 11 years, two months service).

Born: 20 March 1926, Sacramento, CA

Education: Robert Mitchell, Mount Rose Elementary Schools, Billingshurst Jr. High School, Reno High School, 1943; University of Nevada, 1943-44/47-50, B.A. Journalism.

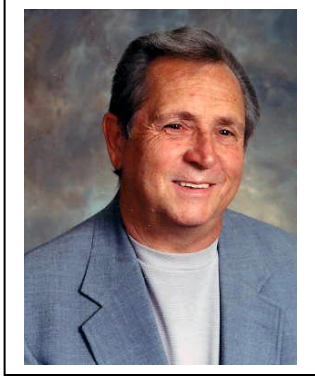
Career: 1944-46/50-52, U. S. Army, Sergeant First Class;
1950-69, Nevada State Journal Newspaper, Reno, Reporter, Sports Writer, Sports Editor, Business/ State News Editor; 1969-92, early retirement; First National (First Interstate) Bank, Employee Publications; 1992, retired.

Personal: Married 20 April 1968 to Lois A. Hendry, Moorpark, CA, no children.

Community: Friends of Washoe County Library, Board member; West Truckee Meadows Citizen Advisory Board, chairman; Professional Advisory Board, University of Nevada, Reno, Reynolds School of Journalism; Veterans Hospital Foundation, Board secretary; Reno-Sparks Bowling Association, past president/Hall of Fame; Reno Chamber of Commerce Distinguished Citizen, 1969; Who's Who in the West, 1992-93.

Professional: International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) charter member, 1969; Silver State IABC, co-founder, past president, Communicator of the Year 1994; Society of Professional Journalists, 1949-life member.

RHSAA Leaders



2004



Class of 1955

Joseph R. Granata, Member #3, Life Member #6

Association service: 1995, Co-founder; 1996-99, Vice President; 2000-2002, President; 2003, Trustee

Born: 17, February 1937, Reno, NV

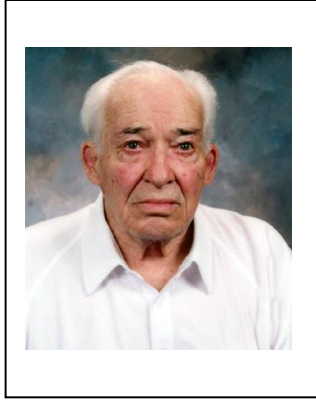
Education: Reno High School, 1955

Career: 1956-1958 – U.S. Navy on U.S.S. Eldorado AGC
1958-1987 – Reno Fire Department
1991-1999 – Owner Laser Sound Mobile Music Co.

Personal: Married 3 April 1959 to Lola Jackson

Children: Sons Jerry and Randy

RHSAA Leaders



1999



Class of 1938

Frank R. Petersen, Member #37

Association Service: 1995, Co-founder; 1995-1997, Counsel/Resident agent.

Born: 10 February 1919, Los Angeles, CA.

Education: Reno High School, 1938; Santa Clara University, 1942; USF Law School, 1952.

Career: 1942-1948, U. S. Army Air Corps, Captain, B-17 bomber pilot;
1948-52, USF Law School;
1952-56, Attorney, Emerson J. Wilson & Associates;
1956-2004, Attorney, private practice, retired.

Personal: Married to Vera Novakovich; son Steve.

Community: Reno High School Athletic Hall of Fame.

Professional: American Bar Association, Nevada State Bar Association, Washoe County Bar Association,
Member.