

78-year-old's fond memories of Akron teacher inspire him to give back

By Linda Golz

Beacon Journal staff writer

POSTED: 06:34 p.m. EDT, Oct 10, 2009

Sometimes you meet someone who makes a lasting impression.

For Norman Sterner, 78, that someone was his first-grade teacher, Goldie Hazlett.

The memory of Hazlett and the lessons she taught him prompted Sterner to donate \$800 — \$100 for each of the eight years he attended the old Mason School on Beaver Street in Akron — to the new school on East Exchange Street in her name.

"Thank you for this," Mason Principal Stephanie Churn said to Sterner when they met Friday. "It will do a lot of good for the children."

She said the money will be used to help provide school supplies, clothing and shoes for the needier students at the school.

Churn led Sterner and his daughter, Desan Sterner, 45, both of Cumming, Ga., on a tour of the school.

Sterner briefly spoke with the second- and third-graders attending the weekly Poetry Cafe. Third-grader John Stark, 9, read the poem *Wishing* by Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

"I can see why you're so proud of this place," Sterner told Churn as they toured the school.

Earlier in the day, he and his daughter were able to tour the old school, now being used as a swing school to house displaced students waiting for their buildings to be renovated or rebuilt.

"First-grade teachers are, generally, considered special," Sterner said. "Even though I only had her [Hazlett] that one semester [in 1937], she inspired me to do well."

Sterner said that although he was only 6 at the time, the life lessons Hazlett taught him stuck.

"In a way she'd be like a mother figure," he said.

Hazlett kept tabs on her former student throughout his years at Mason, and Sterner said he gave her a valentine every year he attended the school.

"I know she was extremely proud of me when I graduated from Mason School" in 1945, he said, in part because he was awarded the American Legion Citizenship Award for being a good, all-around student.

"Of course, I still have [the award]," he said.

It is probable that had Hazlett seen her former student on the Regis Philbin TV show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* in 2000, she would have been even prouder.

Sterner, who was among the oldest people to be on the show — and was at the time of his episode the oldest to get into the hot seat opposite Philbin — made it through the \$16,000 round.

At the \$32,000 question, "I blew it," Sterner said.

He went home with \$1,000.

Had he made it all the way on the quiz show, the donation to Mason would have been larger, he said.

Sterner, a retired Navy veteran, said that even though his isn't a large donation, he hopes the school can "use it to the best advantage to them."

Desan Sterner drove her father to Akron from Georgia, where he has lived since 1978, to attend his 60th Central High School reunion Saturday at Anthe's Restaurant on Manchester Road.

Sterner has two other daughters, Robin Scheungrab of Fredericksburg, Va., and Jerrie Williams of Marathon Key, Fla.