



"ALWAYS SOMETHING SPECIAL IN OUR MEMORY": Steeler Man statue recognizes contributions of Granite City North

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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“When these years have ended

Granite North will be

Always something special

In our memories...”

First verse, “On To Victory” - Granite City North school song



GRANITE CITY – The school existed only for 10 years, but the memories are still strong among those who attended it.

The school was known as **Granite City North**, a second high school in Granite City that opened in **September 1973** and closed in **May 1983** after a decline in enrollment in Granite City's school district forced the Granite City School Board to vote to close North and Russell Johnson Elementary School – both of which had opened 10 years earlier and built when the population in Granite City had been booming and enrollment was rising rapidly.

North and the teams and legacy of the school are still an important part of Granite City's history, and on Sunday afternoon at **Granite City High School's Memorial Stadium**, between the Granite City Sports Hall of Fame building and Kevin Greene Field, four years of fundraising and tireless efforts of a group of North graduates came to a successful end with the unveiling of a statue known simply as **Steeler Man**, built and erected to honor North's legacy and contributions to the city's sporting and educational history.

North was known as the Steelers (established South retained the Warrior name and colors of red and black) and sported the colors of black and gray, a name and colors voted on by Granite City elementary school students the year before the school opened;

the name came about to recognize the steelworkers that helped build Granite City into a thriving industrial city sometimes called “the Pittsburgh of the Midwest.”

In the 10 years North was open, a sometimes fierce inter-city rivalry developed, leading to some memorable moments and games that have become a part of Granite City's sporting legacy.

“I was impressed with it,” said current Granite City school superintendent **Jim Greenwald**. “It's a majestic statue; it's important to recognize our heritage. North was a great place to be (Greenwald was an assistant coach on the football team in the 1970s); it was a big community project and it's a piece of our community.”

“It's pretty cool; it's been a long time coming,” said **Dan Comer**, a 1982 North graduate who helped spearhead the effort to build and erect the Steeler Man statue. “The school closed 33 years ago, and now we have some place to be recognized and remembered in the community. It was quite the soccer rivalry and football (rivalry); it was a lot of fun.

“We miss that rivalry; we don't have it like we used to. It's a part of our history, a part of my youth; it helped make me what I am today. It's important that we be remembered because we were part of the history of Granite City. We've contributed, we've gone off in the world and and we were a product of this high school.”

The idea was hatched at a class reunion in 2012 of North graduates. “Dan came up with an idea, 'wouldn't it be cool if we raised money for a Steeler statue',” said **Cindy Davis Wilson**, a part of the committee that was formed to hold fund-raisers and events to help get the statue built and erected. “Following that, we went to the school and spoke with the principal, then we went to the school board and had a meeting with them.

“They all liked the idea. Four years later, we're here today with the statue.”

Wilson is among those who feel the statue recognizes the contributions of North to the city's sporting history. “It's a great day,” Wilson said. “The support we had from the alumni, the teachers, the principals, it was great; we were overwhelmed with that.”

Much of the support the North committee received came from those who graduated from South prior to the merger in 1983. “We were planning a class reunion and we were talking about this,” Davis said, “At the 30-year reunion (for both the Classes of 1982 from North and South), South did a 50/50 (raffle) and raised \$200 and donated it towards out statue.”

While it can be laughed about today, given the passage of time, the North-South rivalry often became one of the St. Louis area's most intense high school rivalries. “We talked

about the things we used to do to each other,” Wilson said with a laugh. “We did a lot of crazy things, but it was a lot of fun. There are so many memories, so many friendships were made there.”

“This was a very passionate thing,” said **Tami Palmer-Finch**, a North graduate herself. “It's been awesome to see it done. It means everything to me; that's why I became part of the committee to see this happen, for my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren, for everyone to know that we existed.”

“All of Granite City contributed (to the effort) – businesses, South alumni, even kids who are still in school contributed to make this happen.”

When asked what Finch tells today's generation about how intense the North-South rivalry was, Finch tells them the games between the Steelers and Warriors “was fierce. It was awesome; it didn't matter what the sport was either – it was definitely a rivalry.”

In the 10 years North was opened, more than 3,000 students passed through the doors of the school. The statue not only recognizes the North-South legacy, Finch believes, but the students who are a part of the city's legacy. “(The statue recognizes) the more than 3,000 students who attended there as well,” Finch said. “Not just the sporting part of it, the whole 10 years that people went there, the teachers and the administration.

“I still bleed black and gray.”