

# **‘Life is Good’ for Dr. Ed Hightower as he embraces retirement**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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**Click below for gallery from Ed Hightower retirement party:**

The retirement gathering for Edwardsville District 7 Superintendent Dr. Edward Hightower was loaded with testimonials and kind words about his 41 years in education on Friday night.

The event was held at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville Meridian Ballroom.

Steve Jankowski of Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, served as the night's emcee.

Jim Speciale, the man who spearheaded the hiring of Hightower from the Alton School District led off the festivities with the opening address. He said Hightower far exceeded the expectations of those who hired him and he will leave a legacy behind with the school system. Speciale also pointed out the Edwardsville School District has grown by 1,350 new students since Hightower's arrival, another testament to his work.

Next, Joe Gugger and Gordon Broom of the EGHM Foundation spoke about Hightower.

"Under Dr. Hightower, Edwardsville School District has been able to accomplish massive things and become one of the top high schools in America," Gugger said.

Broom said what the Edwardsville superintendent has accomplished will “stand the test of time for future generations.”

Mannie Jackson, an Edwardsville High School and University of Illinois graduate and former player/owner/chairman of the Harlem Globetrotters, also paid a tribute to Hightower calling him “my best friend.”

He described Hightower as “smart” and the very best at whatever he does in life.

Jackson brought up the idea of a life-size statue of Hightower for his work and accomplishments in the district and quickly he had \$50,000 in pledges at the gathering to do it, which most there thought was one of the more amazing things they had witnessed.

Jackson summed up things about Hightower best for those in attendance: “He will leave the greatest legacy of anyone I have known in my life.”

John Simmons, chairman of the Simmons Hanly Conroy Law Firm, said he had been close friends with Hightower for the last 20 years and worked on many boards and projects together. He offered congratulations to Hightower and then laughed and said he thought Ed would retire three more times before he stops working.

Ed Gray, president of the Alton Board of Education and a former administrator with Hightower in the district, said when he thinks of Dr. Hightower, he sees someone motivated, with high energy, demanding, and determined to be successful.

He added that anyone who is associated with Dr. Hightower will benefit from his presence.

Illinois State Rep. Jay Hoffman provided Hightower a resolution that honored him in front of the Illinois General Assembly for his years of service in education. He described him as “a good friend and a mentor.”

Dale Chapman, president of Lewis and Clark Community College, remembered one time in Alton going to a donut shop in 1992 and someone said to him, “I know who you are, you are Ed Hightower.”

“That is what I have been living up to since 1992,” he adds.

Chapman also described Hightower as “smart, loyal, determined and able to say no, along with someone with high expectations.”

Herman Shaw, president of Lincoln School Alumni Foundation, said Ed Hightower had been part of everything that had happened in Edwardsville over the last 19 years.“

During a few video testimonies to Hightower, Kansas coach Bill Self, referee Hank Nichols and announcer Dick Vitale paid tributes.

Hightower, one of the nation’s top basketball officials, was second to none in regard to his passion and concern about fairness in the game, Nichols said.

St. Louis Cardinals’ announcer Mike Shannon said the Edwardsville superintendent has done great things for education.

Edwardsville Mayor Hal Patton called Hightower “an inspiration.”

“Ed treats everyone equally,” Patton said.

Patton said when times get tough, Hightower gets a “gleam” in his eyes and gets stronger, overcoming the odds and difficult situations.

“Ed sells Edwardsville and makes me proud to be part of Edwardsville School District 7,” Patton added.

Hightower has spearheaded hundreds of thousands of dollars coming into the Edwardsville/Glen Carbon communities and guided construction on several new schools, construction projects and renovations over the past 19 years, Patton said.

George Terry, a retired vice president of Lewis and Clark Community College, and Hightower were old softball buddies and are great friends.

One of Terry’s fondest memories of Hightower is his affinity for ice cream and hamburgers. Terry said because he hit a lot of home runs, he was constantly rewarded with free coupons to ice cream/hamburger establishments, where the two shared many ice cream cones and juicy burgers over the years.

He commented about one of Ed’s favorite sayings, “Life is good.”

Terry said part of Hightower fulfills that phrase due to, in part, his work as a community activist.

“No one has given more back to his community than Ed Hightower over the last 20 years.”

Edwardsville School Board President Monica Laurent said the board has been impressed by Dr. Hightower being a strong leader for the district. She said he has raised the bar to great heights and his work ethic and dedication has rubbed off to everyone around him.

Dr. Hightower spoke briefly at the end of the night, thanking everyone present for their support over all the years. There were several in attendance from the Alton School System, where Hightower started his career.

Dr. Lynda Andre, incoming superintendent of Edwardsville schools, was going to speak, but her daughter had a baby earlier in the day and was with her new granddaughter and family. She sent her best wishes to Dr. Hightower in his retirement.

Jennifer and Julie had some moving testimonials about their father, the man they said they both adore.

Jennifer mentioned she was in a “contracts” class in college and told her mom she was going to drop the class and Barbara, Ed’s wife and her mom, shared that with Ed.

Ed was doing a basketball game but he talked to Jennifer about some other things, then the law class came into their conversation.

He said, “I am not working all these basketball games (as a referee) for you to drop classes,” encouraging her to continue.

Jennifer didn’t drop the class and applied herself even more. She ended up getting an A in the class and eventually her law degree, making her father exceptionally proud.

Julie beamed with pride about her father and said he never missed an important moment for her and her sister as they moved through elementary, middle and high school.

“We are very proud of dad,” she said. “He taught us to dream big.” She said to her father she knew “the sky was the limit in his retirement.”

The two Hightower girls singled out some praise for Ed’s two assistants – Diane and Angie for all their hard work over the years, saying they were the unsung heroes of the district.

They further commended their exceptional mom for being “the glue that kept them together.”

The girls had the best words of the night when they concluded their tribute to their dad, saying “You are a girl’s best dream for a father and we are so grateful for you.”

