

## Steven Overweg



“You challenge and inspire; your hope is our desire.” These words from Western Michigan University have a lot of meaning for Steve Overweg, and not just because he’s a proud graduate of the school. They also characterize how he’s lived, and the many influences he’s brought to those fortunate to know him.

Steve Overweg may have traded his native Michigan for Florida, but he’s still very much the proud Midwesterner. Born in Borculo, Mich., and raised in nearby Zeeland, Steve’s life was disrupted when his parents divorced. Already the youngest of four children at age 5, he suddenly found himself the middle child when his mother remarried, and three new children immediately joined the family.

Living with his father, Steve’s fractious relationship with his stepmother often resulted in banishment to his bedroom, where he found solace listening to the radio, especially Detroit Tigers baseball games.

Those broadcasts likely inspired Steve’s lifelong love of music and singing, something he still enjoys if he recognizes the song. He also learned to talk like Donald Duck, a talent he used to entertain children for years afterward. Despite the turmoil at home, Steve forged a great high school life.

He was captain of the football team, and he dated the homecoming queen. Determined to take her to the senior prom, but with little money to spend, Steve borrowed a suit and shoes from the school custodian. The shoes barely fit, but ever the competitor, Steve was ready to put it out...until his date fell ill and couldn’t go. At Western Michigan, Steve was the football team’s second-team kicker.

Though he never earned the starting job, any disappointment was outweighed by Steve’s love of sports, and the fellowship of his teammates, who nicknamed him “The Golden Toe.”

Steve went on to a 38-year career as educator, coach, and administrator for what is now the Westwood Heights School District, near Flint, Mich. Along with teaching physical education and history, he coached Hamady High School’s football team to several local championships. The trophies were great for the kids, but Steve’s biggest “reward” was the opportunity to work with legendary coach Bo Schembechler at the University of Michigan’s summer football camps.

Even after becoming the district’s superintendent of schools, Steve didn’t stray far from the locker room. Learning that an 8th grade football team lacked a coach one year, he coached them himself. Steve and his first wife, Jeanne, raised two daughters during their 24-year marriage.

He later developed a friendship with Debbie, another high school principal, who was divorced with two daughters. They eventually married and created what Debbie—whom he dubbed Cakes, for Little Debbie Cakes—calls a “successful blended family.”

Steve turned the conflict of his early years into a life of pride. He remembered the kindnesses others showed him, and sought to instill those qualities into his children. Steve encouraged them to always give their best, whether it was in the classroom, on the sports field, or in everyday life. He also loved sharing stories and good jokes, including those where he might be the target of some good-natured ribbing. He was comfortable with himself and proud of what he'd accomplished, usually reminding his friends with a chuckle, "Not bad for a little blueberry picker from Borculo."

No, Steve. Not bad at all.