

CORNERSTONE AWARD HONOREE

Cornerstone Award is posthumously given to Robert Toopes. Toopes began teaching in the Gahanna-Jefferson Schools in 1979. He served for nine years as a fifth-grade teacher at Jefferson Elementary from 1979-88, then moved to Middle School East where he taught sixth-grade for four years. He rounded out his 31-year career with the district at Middle School South as a sixth-grade math, science and social studies teacher.

Toopes had a special talent for establishing personal relationships with his students and colleagues, making all who came in contact with him feel special. Letters from parents throughout the years confirm the connections he made with so many people.

Statements include, "My children sensed Mr. Toopes cared about them and the other students in the class," "His sincerity, caring and education made my children enjoy the best year in school," and another parent went on to say that Toopes "went above and beyond his duties to help her son adjust to his new surroundings."

In addition to teaching, Toopes was a talented basketball coach. He coached seventh- and eighth-grade girls' basketball at middle schools East and South beginning in 1988, then moved on to be an assistant girls' basketball coach at Lincoln High School in 2006.

His untimely death brought about the realization of the profound connection he had with so many people, and his positive attitude, warmth and wisdom will remain in the hearts of many. Currently, the students and staff of Middle School South raised funds to create a "Toopesie Trail" in honor of his memory, which is a path behind the school leading down to the football field. The trail will be lined with trees reflecting some of Toopes' favorite colors including scarlet and orange, as well as engraved stone benches. The planting of the trees will begin on May 6, with a committee planning a ceremony to reveal the final project.

GJEF is truly excited to introduce these recipients of the Cornerstone Awards, annually honoring more builders of excellence. Cornerstone recipients who are nominated must have been associated with the school district for a minimum of 10 years as an employee or in other official support roles.