



News Release

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MDE Conference Room Dedicated In Memory Of Former Superintendent Phillip Runkel

LANSING - The fourth floor of the John A. Hannah Building was the place Thursday to witness a moving tribute to former Superintendent of Public Instruction Phillip Runkel as a conference room was dedicated in his honor.

The State Board of Education and Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins dedicated the Dr. Phillip E. Runkel Conference Room as a crowd of more than 150 family members, former co-workers, and well wishers looked on. Attendees enjoyed Runkel's favorite refreshments, including hotdogs, potato chips, and red licorice whips.

The room, which overlooks the state's new Hall of Justice and is used for senior staff level meetings at the Department of Education, is decorated with memorabilia, news clips, and tributes to Runkel's storied career in Michigan education.

"It's a terrific pleasure to honor Phil Runkel in this manner," Watkins said. "As state superintendent, he changed the landscape of Michigan education and made us all realize that public education makes our society who we are. We are extremely privileged to have his name associated with the Department of Education and the State of Michigan."

Runkel served admirably as Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1980-1987. He was well known among the Michigan education community as a tireless advocate of public education.

During his career, he also was Superintendent of the American Community Schools of Athens, Greece, the Grand Rapids Public Schools, and the Utica Community Schools. He began his career in 1952 as a teacher and coach in the Yale Public Schools in Yale, Michigan.

"All of the family joins me in thanking Superintendent Watkins and the State Board of Education in honoring my husband. We sincerely appreciate the tribute," said Mary Runkel, wife of Phil Runkel, who died in 1998 after a battle with lung cancer.

Mrs. Runkel shared fond memories of her husband, and shared with attendees a message that all future meeting goers that use the conference room should remember.

"The last millage campaign that Phil ran as superintendent of Grand Rapids Public Schools had as its theme, 'Making it Happen!'," she said. "People using this room will remember Phil's dedication to public education and they will make it happen for all of Michigan's children."

Runkel's younger brother, Tom, also paid tribute to his brother during the ceremony.

"He was a great advocate for education, and a fabulous brother. Sometimes it is hard to believe that he's really gone," Tom Runkel said. "This conference room is a terrific honor and will help to keep Phil's memory alive forever."

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