

Howard C. Metz

This week we are happy to name Howard C. Metz as the 136th inductee in Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Howie Metz was nominated by his daughter, , Kathleen Metz Schweikl, written by Mike Meyers.

Howard "Howie" Metz was at one time, the assistant chief of the Marshfield Fire Department, who in his time off coached the Sacred Heart Grade School football team, coached the Marshfield Youth Hockey Team and raised his family of ten children.

Howie was born in the Town of Rock on April 29, 1922. He came to Marshfield with his parents, Herman and Lillian (David) Metz, a few years later.

He attended Sacred Heart Grade School, Purdy Junior High School, and Marshfield High School where he graduated with the Class of 1940. Athletically inclined he played on the Marshfield Junior American Legion Baseball team and was recognized with numerous sports letters in conference football, boxing and hockey during high school.

On October 27, 1942 Metz left Marshfield for training with the U.S. Marine Corps. After completing his basic and signal corps training he was assigned to the headquarters squadron of a USMC air wing, South Pacific Theater of Operations for 19 months. On September 11, 1944, during a short leave between duty assignments, Metz returned home to marry Beatrice "Betty" Buchholtz, daughter of Edwin and Caroline Buchholtz at Sacred Heart Church. He then reported to Santa Barbara Marine Corps Air Base, California, followed by his last assignment at El Centro Marine Corps Air Station, California. Completing his military obligations, he was discharged on October 10, 1945 and returned home. Here, he was employed as a carpenter for the Thomson-Abbott Construction Company.

Metz is probably best remembered in Marshfield for his service as a member of the Marshfield Fire Department. In 1948 Marshfield transitioned from its part-time volunteer fire protection service to a full-time paid department, providing an ideal opportunity for young WWII military veterans like Howie. He applied for one of the positions, tested successfully, and was appointed to the first shift of 12 candidates with the new paid Marshfield Fire Department beginning on April 1, 1948. Seven more men reported for duty the next day for their 24-hour shift. Beginning pay was \$180 per month.



During October that year, Metz completed a special firefighting course with the Milwaukee Fire Department. While training, he studied in a firemen's school during the day and worked actively with various Milwaukee fire companies at night.

On May 2, 1949, Howard Metz, Verlyn Ziegahn and Marvin Matowitz were promoted to lieutenants. Each had taken firefighting training with the Milwaukee or Chicago departments. That November, Metz took over duties as president of the local firefighter's union. The following February, Metz and Ziegahn, were promoted to the new position of captain in the department.

When Fire Chief Houren resigned from the department on April 1, 1952 Metz was appointed acting chief. Both he and Ziegahn applied for the position, and the Marshfield Fire and Police Commission gave each of them a chance to prove themselves equally, temporarily appointing Ziegahn acting chief effective October 1, 1952, while Metz returned to being captain. The commission had, "high praise for Metz' work as acting chief, citing the cooperation which has existed in the department as a whole."

The two appeared for a three-hour civil service exam for the post of fire chief. Their answers to about 175 questions were graded by the State Bureau of Personnel in Madison. Because the two applicants for the top job were so similar, the commission faced a "difficulty of major proportions" because state officials who scored the civil service test reported that the two men had tied for the top score.

On April 16, 1953, in a "dramatic midnight decision," the commission named Acting Chief Verlyn Ziegahn as chief of the Marshfield Fire Department. Ziegahn was called from his home and Metz, on duty, was called from the dormitory near the commission's meeting place to hear the decision together. Metz promptly offered his hand to congratulate the new chief. Ziegahn recommended that Metz be named the assistant chief.

While serving as assistant fire chief, Metz helped to upgrade and train the Roddis Fire Brigade, an organized supplemental force inside Marshfield's largest manufacturer; establish training with the Marshfield Rural Fire Department, originally consisting of five surrounding volunteer fire departments; and in 1964, implement the new municipal emergency ambulance service.

Under the guidance of Metz, firefighters in the department collected old toys, wagons, bicycles and sleds ahead of Christmas each year to repair and refurbish with a fresh coat of paint for kids who might not otherwise receive nice Christmas gifts.

In his off-time, Metz continued to participate in local sports and served on the board of the Marshfield Athletic Club promoting sports activities in the city throughout the 1960's and early 1970's. He coached youth football at Sacred Heart School, and with Stan Martin, the

city's first Recreation Director, helped re-establish the youth hockey program in 1967. In less than four years, Coach Metz' team was the first Marshfield team in a quarter of a century to win a hockey tournament when they swept four straight games to win the February 1971 tournament held in Eau Claire.

Having grown up participating in Boy Scouts, as a father, Metz dedicated personal time to the local Boy Scout organization, actively serving in various capacities. He also taught safety and first-aid to babysitting classes.

In 1972, Howie fell ill to a kidney ailment, and died on November 11, at the age of 50.

Howard Metz is remembered for his many contributions as a Marshfield firefighter, and for his unselfish involvement in local organizations, all of which contributed to making Marshfield a better place to live.