

# **The Banks High School Alumni Foundation**

## **Focus on Alumni**

### **Bill Tolke (Banks '48)**

Even though the community of Banks is relatively small, many Banks High School graduates have experienced success. They have made an impact not only on our community, but also on this great Country of ours. There are Banks graduates who, among other occupations, have become engineers, scientists, Court of Appeals Justices, mothers, lawyers, farmers, dentists, fathers, engineers, small and large business owners, loggers, military personnel, teachers, nurses, newscasters, truck drivers, barbers, financial planners, insurance agents, and even television stars. Some have moved away, while some have called Banks their home for their entire lives. Each year we would like to highlight one graduate who has made a difference in people's lives.



This year's Alumni Focus is on Bill Tolke. Bill was born on the family farm in Manning in 1931. While attending Banks High School, he was a founding member of the Bank's Future Farmers of America Chapter. He even went to the National FFA Convention in Kansas City his senior year – something he was very proud of. He graduated from Banks High School in 1948 with a class size of about 20 students. Only he and one other student went on to college that year, but many went into the military. Bill attended OSU for one year and he was a frequent visitor for Dad's weekends, homecoming games and basketball games while one of his sons attended the same college, years later. Bill's college career was interrupted by the death of his father and the "selective service" of the U.S. Army, with an assignment to Korea in late 1953. Upon his return from Korea (and meeting his wife, Betty) he set up a home on the family farm. He farmed and worked in the woods with Ambrose and Hank Schmidlin, where he believed you could nearly always get a job if there was a willingness to work. Bill and Betty had three children who are each a Banks Brave, though, as Bill states, "not as radical as I am". Bill remained active in the community of Banks, being a founding member of the Banks Booster Club and helped build the grandstands at Kelly Field. His daughter, Susie, remembers watching her dad climb the light poles to install the lights for the football field. Bill and Betty had a "lifetime pass" to Banks sporting events and his son, Jeff, recalls Bill and Betty attending all games, whether or not they had kids in high school at the time, missing one only if they were deer hunting the first week of October! Bill spent many a game running chains, which provided him a perfect view of the action. Bill served on the Banks School Board for eight years, and as Chairman, two times, and chaired the Auction Committee, as well. He and Betty were very active in the Mom and Dad's Club, the Fire Department, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion Auxiliary, the Cemetery Committee, Work'n Win Club, and the Manning

Social Club. Bill also served on the Tri-City Rural Fire Board for a number of years. It is believed that Bill's sense of civic duty can be attributed, in part, to his own father, who served on the Banks School Board in the 30's and 40's. After retiring in the mid 90's, he and Betty moved to Central Oregon, specifically Redmond, and he has been there since then. He follows the Braves' exploits as much as possible, but states that "Central Oregon media is not known for its comprehensive recognition of Valley events!"

When asked about what it meant to be a Banks Alumni, he stated, "I am about to make a statement that an increasing number of people cannot make. It is not an apology or a boast, but more a result of a fortunate set of circumstances determined by circumstances beyond ordinary peoples' control. Growing up, the opportunities were readily available for those willing to pay the price. The price was the desire and the ability to take on the necessary requirements to take advantage of what was available. I never experienced being out of a job or at least being able to choose most of my path. That is certainly not the environment today. I'm not disclosing any secrets when I write such words. The message is that one must prepare themselves by extra training and/or education beyond high school -- if there is a desire to live at the level most people aspire. I'm not suggesting that everyone should become a brain surgeon or nuclear physicist, but I am alluding to the ability to provide or compete in the work world. This is not an attempt to paint everyone with the same brush. It is meant to be a push for taking advantage of any viable and reasonable perks out there."



"That, in a back door way, gets me to the BHS Alumni Foundation and its desire to enhance within its abilities, scholarships for those who qualify. After the vision, participation and enthusiasm of the original group (who were the organizers, shakers and movers) began to thin out due to age, I felt a need to be a part of this worthy effort. I don't remember the year I started being active, but I do know that it has been the source of a great deal of personal satisfaction to have witnessed the accomplishment of many of the former recipients. In its way, the financial help, however percentage wise small, has added to the quality of the family of Banks High School Alumni. This didn't exist when I was a student at Banks but I'm still a Brave even if the State of Oregon says we are politically incorrect. The concept of "family" is very prevalent in the thoughts of the past and present Board of Directors."

We want to thank Bill Tolke, and all the Banks Alumni who, over the years, have made possible hundreds of scholarships (and thousands of dollars) available for graduating seniors. They ensure that our future will be bright.