

Stevens' firing stuns Kennedy

Patrick Stevens has been fired. At a hearing held on Feb. 27, the Bloomington School Board voted four to two, terminating his contract. However, even though the school board has physically removed him from Kennedy, Mr. Stevens is neither gone nor forgotten.

The school board spent five and one-half hours debating and revising 32 findings that were brought out at the hearing held the previous Monday. Mr. Stevens was found guilty of spending "a proportion of his time teaching a subject not among those regularly assigned to him," "gross inefficiency," "willful neglect of duty," and "insubordination," among others.

When it became apparent as to what the decision would be, the atmosphere in the courtroom changed radically. People who had been bored and restless before were suddenly intensely involved. Several people, teachers and stu-

dents were crying - both for Mr. Stevens and for what his case represented. The audience became almost as one, as a feeling of disbelief and despair set in.

Through it all, Mr. Stevens was calm. When it was all finally over, he gave of himself, offering love and brotherhood to everyone he met. It would be impossible to count the number of times two people would embrace each other in a wordless gesture of solidarity. Then, after the hearing, there was a gathering at the Stevens' house.

Before leaving, Mr. Stevens left a message for all students at Kennedy High School. "I will miss you very much and I feel that I have given myself to you for the kind of humanistic education that I think you deserve, and that I think you should start demanding. The atmosphere of this school has been repressive to students and faculty alike. Change it. If my firing has any purpose at all, it is change. And I mean not just any kind of change, but positive, creative change."

The proposed conclusion to terminate Mr. Stevens' contract brought varied reactions from board members. Dr. Harley Racer, one of the two members who opposed termination of the contract, said that he felt the "problems could be resolved." Ray Glumack, a member of PRIDE (Parents and Residents Interested in De-

cent Education), stated, "We have to judge him on what's best for the district," but added that he made his decision with a "heavy heart." Chairman of the Board James Kempf said, "I am afraid of the reaction . . . were Mr. Stevens to remain in the system."

The school board members cast their votes on termination of Mr. Stevens' contract as follows in order of roll call: Luther Ford - passed, Robert Rainey - yes, James Kempf - yes, Gilbert Williams - yes, Luther Ford - no, Harley Racer - no.

Mr. Stevens was suspended last Jan 15, because of Principal R. F. Vinatieri's objections to a play Mr. Stevens had planned to use in his Greek Studies Class. However, at the hearing held on Feb. 23, it was determined that the play was not the major cause of the suspension; rather it was a "case of contract violation," according

to Kingsley Holman, attorney for the prosecution. The defense attempted to prove that any charges leveled specifically against Mr. Stevens were in widespread use among other teachers at Kennedy as well.

Following the hearing, Mr. Del Holz, co-founder of KARE (Keep Actively Relating Equally), said, "I personally feel that the action taken against Pat Stevens is itself a gross obscenity. In firing Pat, the school board never seriously considered the cost to education in Bloomington. This action will serve to repress all creative teachers and teaching in Bloomington and the rest of the state."

Mrs. Janis Jensen, English teacher at Kennedy, expressed the feelings of many. "I simply cannot believe this dismissal on the basis of the evidence. I think Bloomington teachers can be very frightened of what this portends for the creative teacher."

What kind of a school is Kennedy?

by Jeff Holman

Though only a few years old, John F. Kennedy High School has already distinguished itself in many areas. It is one of two large high schools in the major suburb of Bloomington, a town with its own Southdale shopping center and Bloomington State Bank.

KHS athletic teams are among the finest in the state. Kennedy displays its trophies in proud cases, and hold assemblies in the fall and spring to honor its mighty eagle. Competition is especially fierce with its cross-town rival, Lincoln High School.

Spectacular fall and winter plays are staged every year at Kennedy. The school also has its own skinny drama teacher . . . but perhaps all drama teachers are skinny.

Kennedy principals and assistant principals spend most of their time in their offices every day, which are rather removed from the classroom areas. The student who is sent to "the office" to see the assistant principal knows he is "in trouble."

Student apathy is a major concern at Kennedy High School. Students occasionally become riled up, though. Usually a teacher or teachers is the central issue. They even had walkouts and demonstrations this year.

Black people practically don't exist in Kennedy High School. There may be only one or two of them. But that is not due to any kind of racial prejudice; it's just that black people cannot obtain homes in prosperous Bloomington.

Kennedy High is a big school, with over 2,000 students. Its extensive curriculum is geared to sending kids to college, and to other places, too. It has overhead projectors, typing rooms, listening areas, and white slips for overdue library books.

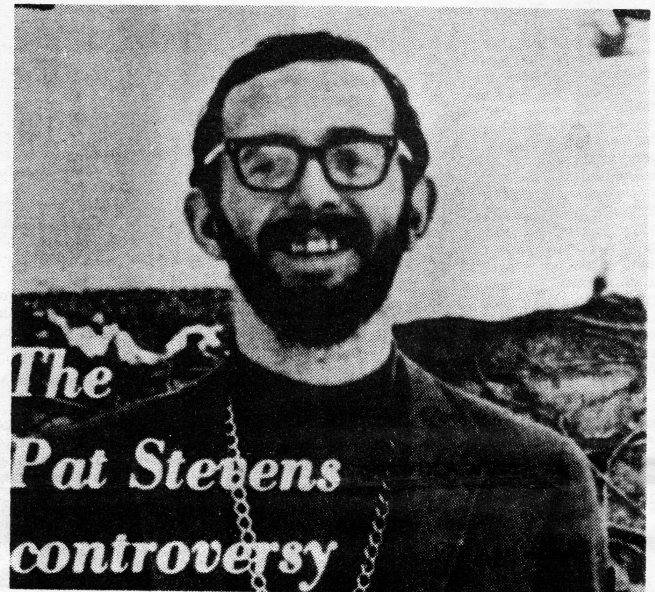
Kennedy has its own unique personality, and its own unique impersonality.

Kennedy has its own John Goedeke's and James Warren's and Bob Erdman's.

Kennedy is a lot like another suburban high school we know well.

(Note: Editor Jeff Holman was a student in Kennedy High School for a year and a half.)

Stories and photos on this page, excluding "What kind of a school is Kennedy?" are reprinted courtesy of Kennedy's student newspaper, the Torch.



Board decision causes fear

Student newspaper condemns administration action

We still can't believe it. Pat Stevens has been fired? It sounds too much like a story from the pen of Lewis Carroll, a sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*.

Like so many others, we find it difficult to understand the board's reasoning. When the small incidents of misconduct (leaving the classroom, failure to file lesson plans, duplicating a modern play without permission) are weighed against Mr. Stevens' outstanding credentials, his fantastic ability to communicate with both students and teachers, and his intense interest in human relations, we see only one outcome. We wonder how the board chose the other.

The misconduct of which Mr. Stevens was said to have been guilty certainly seemed to be common to most teachers. Therefore, it seems obvious that Mr. Stevens was singled out for reasons other than simply those in the charges against him.

And yet, Kingsley Holman, prosecuting attorney, said it was not a matter of censorship or academic freedom, but of contract violation. If this was truly the only reason for Mr. Stevens' dismissal, each teacher would have to fear for his position. As it is, we do not believe that these specific charges leveled against Mr. Stevens were the sole cause of his firing. As it is, only the creative teachers have to fear for their positions.

In the maze of petty details, Mr. Stevens as a human being seemed to be lost. The board members seemed to insulate themselves from the man Pat Stevens in layers of words, details, and meaningless facts. Even though both the school board and the observers seemed to reject the idea that the cause of the hearing was only the detailed charges (note the continued reference by both sides to Mr. Stevens as a "free spirit", giving attention to his personality),

they missed the man. They dwelt on certain specific actions of the "said teacher." They judged him from afar. How could they hope to understand him when they didn't get near him?

Who can say what far-reaching effects this "termination of contract" will have? From the opinions of some teachers, a feeling of fear could become the dominant force in our school. Will this send creative teachers "underground" to watch every move of the administration furtively? Will it keep good teachers away from Bloomington? Or will it succeed in squelching teacher-creativity and stifling teacher-student communication beyond the immediate subject matter?

And what does this mean to the students? We believe it signals a return to "3x plus y equals 39, and no room for questions — the capitol of California is Sacramento, but don't mention Watts — analyze a poem but don't discuss it in personal terms." We are the ones who will suffer directly as a result of this case. We may be forced to go into the world armed only with the 3 R's, not having learned to communicate in a time when communication is so vital. We desperately hope that the remaining teachers will not abandon us in fear for themselves.

Probably by the time this issue comes out, the repercussions will have begun. We hope students and teachers alike will express their feelings. If we allow this precedent to be set without protest, we are just as guilty of firing Mr. Stevens and creating the results as the school board is.

The administration succeeded in removing Pat Stevens from Kennedy, but we hope it doesn't feel too elated over its "victory." It's lost much more than it could have hoped to gain.