



HOLDREGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

Giving Back to Education

HHS Alumni Recognition Feature!

Dear HHS Alumni and HPS Foundation Supporters,

Holdrege High School is fortunate to have many very successful graduates. We are excited to continue sharing the stories of some of those HHS Alums thanks to the journalistic talents of Kristine (Long) Jacobson, Class of 1990.

In June, several classes enjoyed reunions during Swedish Days, and our ***HPS Foundation 5th Annual Golf Tournament*** was a huge success.

We also welcome your suggestions and comments and encourage you to join the Duster Alumni Association (*see form below*).

Sincerely,

Matt Allmand, Chairman

HPS Foundation Committee

Lonnie Dean Nelson - Class of 1963

Nelson enjoyed Air Force "detour" while never losing sight of longtime dream.

by Kristine Jacobson

Lonnie Dean Nelson had a plan. After high school, he would attend Colorado State University and pursue his dream of working in fish and wildlife management. "My first love was hunting and fishing," Nelson said. "I started hunting when I was literally a child."

He recalls his dad, Vernon, telling him as a young boy growing up on the farm that, "you are better off with a shotgun going on a walk than going to town." His plan hit a detour that lasted 25 years and took him around the world as an Air Force pilot and trainer. But, he eventually did earn a degree in Fish and Wildlife Management from CSU and was able to share his first love with thousands of children, making a profound impact on their lives.

After graduating from Holdrege High School in 1963, Nelson realized his dream was too expensive. So he attended Kearney State College, which was more affordable, and earned a degree in secondary education.

With his dream still in the back of his mind, Nelson decided that maybe the GI Bill could help him. So, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. He recalled as a child seeing a Korean War

veteran swoop down in his airplane to drop local business advertisements to area farms. Nelson was 7 at that time. "That was the ignition - wouldn't it be neat to fly," Nelson said.

Nelson passed the admission standards to be an Air Force pilot and was sent to officer's training school in San Antonio. He then went to pilot training school in Big Spring, Texas, where he discovered that flying a plane was a lot like driving a tractor on the farm. "I had never even been in an airplane until I went to officer's training," Nelson said. "But flying came natural to me because I always related it to driving a tractor."



Lonnie Dean Nelson

Nelson then began his service in the Vietnam War. He flew as a Forward Air Controller monitoring trucks going North or South on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. He flew 198 missions in Vietnam in 1969-70 and is lucky to have survived. "Aviation is hours and hours of boredom interspersed with minutes of sheer terror," he said of his Vietnam experience.

After his four years with the Air Force, Nelson was ready to leave the military and earn his degree in Fish and Wildlife Management. But fate stepped in. On the day he was to sign his separation papers, a pilot became ill and Nelson was asked to take his place. Because of that, he was three days late to sign his papers. However, he realized that he was the only pilot in his group who didn't sign the papers. Therefore, he was offered excellent training opportunities and benefits with the Air Force. "I quit thinking about getting out of the service," Nelson said.

So, he stayed in for more than 20 years serving in various countries as a pilot, instructor and pilot evaluator. This included three missions to Thailand and four years in Germany. "I did not get to go to Africa or Antarctica, but I got to go to every other continent," Nelson said.

Fate stepped in again when he met his wife, Tricia, on a special assignment to San Antonio, where she was serving as an Air Force nurse. They married and are now parents to two boys, Blaine, born in 1981; and Bryce, born in 1983.

On September 30, 1988, Nelson decided it was time to retire from the Air Force, and he did so as a Lt. Colonel. With help from the GI Bill, he attended college at CSU in Fort Collins, graduating with a master's degree in Fish and Wildlife Management. He took a job with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources and was assigned to start fishing programs in all Kentucky counties.

"We had 120 counties, and I had a program in every county," Nelson said. He had 30 different programs alone in Louisville, but one was special. He worked with a friend who was finding volunteer opportunities for retired teachers. His friend recruited 24 volunteers, and they started a fishing program for at-risk kids in seventh and eighth grades. In school, the kids spent six weeks learning how to

fish. Then, they experienced a fishing trip with the volunteers. One girl was part of the program because she had never spoken to anyone at school. Nelson teared up recalling that the girl finally spoke when she went fishing. "She just got so excited," Nelson said. "She started babbling, and no one could understand her." They realized she was speaking Bosnian. Her mother had moved her to the United States to live with relatives while the war was raging in Bosnia. After the fishing experience, volunteers helped the girl learn English and find a way to stay in the United States.

That fishing program blossomed, and 2,400 kids were taught how to fish every spring and fall in Louisville. "Every child has a different learning style, and some kids learn better in the outdoors - hands on," Nelson said. "Fishing is a great way to teach kids."

Because of his experiences with fishing and volunteers, Nelson is an advocate of volunteering. "The youth of America need to see that adults care," he said. "You have to realize what a volunteer can do for you."

During Nelson's career in fish and wildlife, he also wrote the guide "Basic Hunting: Passing on a Time-Honored Tradition" that was published by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. He also revised the book, "Basic Fishing: Catch the Fishing Fever."

He retired from his fish and wildlife career on September 30, 2005. He and his wife built a log home on Lake Barkley in western Kentucky and are now "living the good life." "I didn't retire to cut grass," he said. "When the fish aren't biting, and it's a bad day to play golf, I cut grass."

Nelson was recently in Holdrege for his 50th Class Reunion and enjoyed reminiscing with his high school classmates. Nelson was one of the first students to attend the R-7 school, which opened when he was a fifth grader. When he moved to Holdrege as a fourth-grader, he recalls his teacher, Mrs. Youngquist. "She was a super teacher," he said. "That was the first time I really engaged in school."

He also has fond memories of Mr. Jim Van Marter and the good sense of community that he learned growing up in Phelps County.

Nelson is donating copies of the hunting and fishing guides he published to the school libraries in Holdrege. He also donated fishing poles and equipment to the YMCA of the Prairie in Holdrege in memory of his father so that more kids can learn through fishing in the great outdoors.

About Us

The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.

Holdrege Public Schools Foundation

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Holdrege Public Schools Foundation

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