

**ROBERT MINTON BENNETT**

1988

# Principal loved his students

BY JOHN MACLEAN

Robert Bennett of Plantagenet was quite possibly one of Ontario's best elementary school teachers and principals. He died of a heart attack May 10. He was 49.

He was utterly devoted to his schools, his students, and his family.

He was born at Verdun, Que., in 1948 and attended Lachine High School. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from Sir George Simpson (later Concordia University) in 1970 and obtained a Bachelor of Education degree a year later. He taught first at Cecil Newman public school in Montreal where he met his future wife, Linda Stabler, also a teacher. They married in 1974.

Moving to Chesterville, he was special education co-ordinator for the Prescott Russell school board from 1976 to 1981.

The Bennetts next moved to Vankleek Hill with their two children, Megan, then 4, and Trevor, 1.

By 1984, he was made principal of Plantagenet public school where he would spend the rest of his short working life, 14 years, and see enrolment rise from 162 to more than 300.

A third child, Kelsey, was born in 1986.

Maralie Martin, a family friend and



**Robert Bennett was principal of Plantagenet public school.**

neighbour, helped Linda put his career into notes: "He was determined to help every child become computer literate and that each would begin the road to success aided by its strongest attribute.

"He advocated 'positive reinforcement,' finding something best in every child and encouraging it.

"He was in the halls all the time, talking to his students whom he knew by name and character. He saw them not only when they were in trouble

but when they had done something well.

"He met the school buses every morning, often skipped rope with students at recesses, and played soccer with them.

Students remember him for 'his corny jokes' and loved him for them.

A kindergarten student, Olive Blonsky, wants to know: "Who will sign my art work now?"

He had a huge model train layout and a workshop in which he once made a lamp shade out of an old boot.

He was a member of Rotary and worshipped at Trinity United in Vankleek Hill. He founded the Chesterville Historical Society and recently helped found a new church, Circles of Faith in Vankleek Hill.

Mr. Bennett and his family were travellers and inveterate campers, during holidays, trying to visit every Canadian national park. They whale watched; and visited Newfoundland.

He counted the months until they could all go skiing, mostly at Mt. Gabriel.

Mrs. Martin remembers finally, "He was always optimistic and fun."

Kelsey remembers particularly, "I never saw him a day without a smile and saying to each of us 'I love you'. He really did."

## Bennett memorial

**PLANTAGENET** — Students, teachers, staff and parents gathered at Plantagenet Public School on Tuesday for a memorial tribute to Robert Bennett. The computer lab was dedicated to his memory and six trees were planted on the grounds as a living tribute to Bennett. He died suddenly at age 49 on May 10 and had been the school's principal since 1984. Photographs from the assembly will appear in next week's edition of The Review.