

Bus Driver for 40 Years, Russell Flagler Is Honored By His Colleagues at OSD

You probably know the bus. But maybe not the driver. Anyway he is retired — but not dismissed by his passengers of 40 years standing — not by a long shot to judge by last night in Belleville.

The bus is the familiar grey-blue school bus (the only one around here that picks up both teachers and students) operated for the Ontario School for the Deaf.

The driver was Russell Flagler who formally retired last night at a testimonial dinner in Club Canara — after 40 years' bus-driving for the OSD. Not that he was just a bus-driver, as the events of the evening proved. To a parade of passengers, ranging from provincial educational specialists down, he was more along the lines of a shepherd.

More than 140 of those shepherded passengers, from teachers now departed to school superintendents past and present, indicated their regret at his departure last night.

However, Mr. Flagler's personality combines a puckish humor with a natural modesty, where praise eventually becomes an intrusion. So it's hardly fair to him to keep telling what he meant to them and how they expressed it last night.

DEMEZA'S TRIBUTE

For the record, it was properly summed up by the present OSD superintendent, Joseph Demeza.

Amid the words of the evening's toast to Mr. Flagler, the superintendent added:

"So I think we are paying tribute here now to one who has been in the fullest sense of the word what is expected of a loyal, efficient, conscientious civil servant."

Mr. Flagler, a veteran of World War 1 first started work with the OSD in 1923. Mr. Demeza revealed to the assembly last

night he had recently found a filed letter from the school to provincial authorities dated three years later - - 1926. In seeking a pay raise for bus-driver-messenger, it reveals a social contrast between then and now. In part, it said:

"This man drives the bus and he does the messenger work. In addition he looks after the poultry and feeds the hogs.

"He has made the poultry a paying proposition and we have never had a man who made the hogs pay as well as he has."

The personal touch added to civil service ways of doing things was emphasized by Mr. Demeza.

"He had a remarkable sense, I think, in knowing what to do — and knowing how far you can go in being of service, the necessary, desirable and nice things and going the second mile for the individual and the staff as a whole. He had a very fine fine balance of . . . what to do on his own."

The implied infraction of red tape rules for the sake of serious personal situations was obvious.

Mr. Demeza's predecessor W. J. Morrison also lent weight to the personal evaluation with his recollections of OSD problems during the war, and prewar years, when Mr. Flagler continued shepherding teachers and pupils to and through schools.

TEACHERS' TRIBUTES

The teachers themselves, past and present insisted in joining in the Flagler memorabilia of 40 years at OSD by recalling the various problems on which they pressed him into service, above and beyond the call of civil service duty. These ranged from despatching downtown to change a blouse at Eaton's to seeking out the right color (which he apparently did) in demands for a five-cent postage stamp.

Finally, music-teacher Alec Gordon struck the highlight of

the evening by introducing Mr. Flagler to his retirement gift, a combination living room and dining room suites.

And that was the way they physically paid tribute to the OSD civil servant. As images go these days, a civil servant is a type to be wary of. But he reflected the day-to-day activity of those who staff the OSD, civil service with a difference.

"You see," said one official last night, "they are all rather dedicated people."