

Demeza, Dr. Joe

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That was back in 1933 and, for two years, he taught more than 50 students, from all grades, in that room.

He then became principal of a three-room school in West Ferris (now part of North Bay). He stayed on as principal for 12 years, during which time he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Queen's University and his Master of Education degree and a public school inspector's qualifications program.

In 1947, he was promoted superintendent of public schools in Kirkland Lake and Demeza thought he was set for a lengthy career up north.

However, a phone call from a Ministry of Education official in April of 1950 changed all that.

"He asked me if I would consider coming to Belleville to succeed Mr. W.J. Morrison as superintendent of the Ontario School for the Deaf in Belleville. It was a great surprise and quite a new venture for me."

So, Demeza left Kirkland Lake and embarked on his new career in deaf education. He prepared for it by taking a year off to student education for the deaf in Manchester, England. He then spent more than six months visiting schools for the deaf in Canada and the United States.

In his 29 years as superintendent, enrollment grew to a high of 550 and new buildings were opened — the junior school and residence, new heating plant

Where are they

NOW?

and laundry, staff residence (now a student residence), vocational school, infirmary and audiological clinic.

Another addition, the gymnasium and swimming pool complex, opened in the fall of 1970. It was immediately named the J.G. Demeza Sports Centre.

"I was very much honored by that and still am," he said.

Among the programs introduced by the school during Demeza's stay were the home visiting program for preschoolers, vocational training, aphasic program, the day school program and home busing on weekends.

Throughout his career at Whitney, Demeza said his priority was to "provide the best education possible for students."

As Demeza was busy in his years at Whitney so is he busy in retirement.

"I wondered how I ever had the time to work," he quipped.

Demeza has continued serving on various boards, including the Bridge Street United Church, United Church Ministry With the Deaf and Albert College.

He's also on the committee of adjustment for the city of Belleville.

Demeza has been a member of the Bridge Street United Church choir since 1979.

He's now in his 41st year with the Rotary Club of Belleville, involved primarily with its music festival and, most recently, with providing assistance to schools for the deaf in the Caribbean.

When he isn't attending meetings, Demeza enjoys various local arts and entertainment performances, traveling, golf and swimming.

His wife, Reinette, died in 1988. The couple never had children but Demeza said he enjoys visiting with his five grand nieces and nephews.

"My brother, Don, moved to Belleville when he retired. And he only lives behind me. Naturally, we spend a lot of time going through each other's backyards."