

ALUMNI OF THE MONTH - NOVEMBER, 2019

Name: James Goochee

Year of Graduation: 1970

What have you done since graduating from Port Allegany High School?

When I graduated from high school, I went to barbering school in Erie. I graduated from there in two years and did an apprenticeship in Bradford. I was hired at the (glass) plant in 1973. I wanted a place where I could stay and work for the rest of my life. I had no regrets working there, the plant was good to me. I retired from the plant in February of 2019.

I got into canoeing. My junior and senior year I got hooked up with David Kanally. That's how I actually got started. I heard about this big race up in Cooperstown, it was a 70 miler and I always wanted to do it. The first 70 miler I did with Donnie Spencer. This was a two man canoe and there were probably 250 or 300 in that class. I had no idea what to expect, it was all new to me. We paddled 45 miles with nothing to drink. We didn't know what was going on. So anyhow, that first year we finished 50th out of 250, and I said, "Holy smokes, we did this good without knowing what was going on," that's when I was hooked. I can do better and I'm coming back next year and that's what we did. This past year I did my 40th time. In those races, the main thing is to finish. Like anything else, anything you do you gotta finish...and then take it from there.

Canoeing, going to so many states, I met so many nice people. I used to take my mom and dad, that's how they fell in love with my mom and dad and if I didn't bring 'em people would ask where they were?

When I got started, my dad was shaking his head saying, "Why are you doing this son? You're not getting anything out of this."

I said, "Dad, it's something that I got to do. It's a hobby and it's a good hobby and I'll get there one of these days." And sure enough, in a few years I started getting good. I've been on top a few times. I won 70 milers quite a few times, different classes and different races, nationals. So I'm happy with what I did. Now anymore, the 70 milers, it doesn't matter where I finish, I just want to finish it just for the years. I've finished 40 of the 70 mile races.

Where do you currently live?

Port Allegany, Pennsylvania

Who was your favorite teacher in high school? Why were they your favorite?

Back then there was a lot of good teachers, but I liked Mr. Borro. He lived up on Hillside. He was a reading teacher and I wasn't the greatest reader in school when I started out. He was down to earth, understanding, he was almost like my dad. That's the kind of guy he was. He helped everybody out. He was a really nice guy.

And then Dave Mensch. He was a science teacher. I always liked him as well - and I was a boy scout too, I got my eagle badge and made it all the way to the top - he helped me out on a project for my badge. Dave was an excellent teacher.

Cy Dann was a physical education teacher. Mr. Christensen he was on Hillside. He was an art teacher. He was a football coach. He was a nice guy. There were a lot of 'em.

What is your fondest memory of Port Allegany High School?

There was a couple of things related to sports. There was this one football game, I remember the Otto-Eldred Township game, and they had a good team. I played tackle on defense. I don't know if the pulling guard missed his cue, but I lined up and three times in a row I tackled the quarterback for a loss. We won the game. Monday night Coach Christensen brought my name up. He said, "This guy deserves a starting roll." So that's how I got started on that. I was so happy with that.

I like playing on the team that graduated in 1969. Those guys had an undefeated season. It was nice playing with those guys.

Like I said, up through school there was a lot of good experiences going to proms and stuff. It was just a good time, but it goes fast.

Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

Over the years I had a gym downstairs (at my home) - a weight gym and a paddling tank. The gym was - we started out small, but then it started growing and I had high school kids, kids that, they might not have turned out the best of kids in life, but I think by having them come up here lifting and stuff, I was hoping, their future, their life, hoping that it turned them around a little bit.

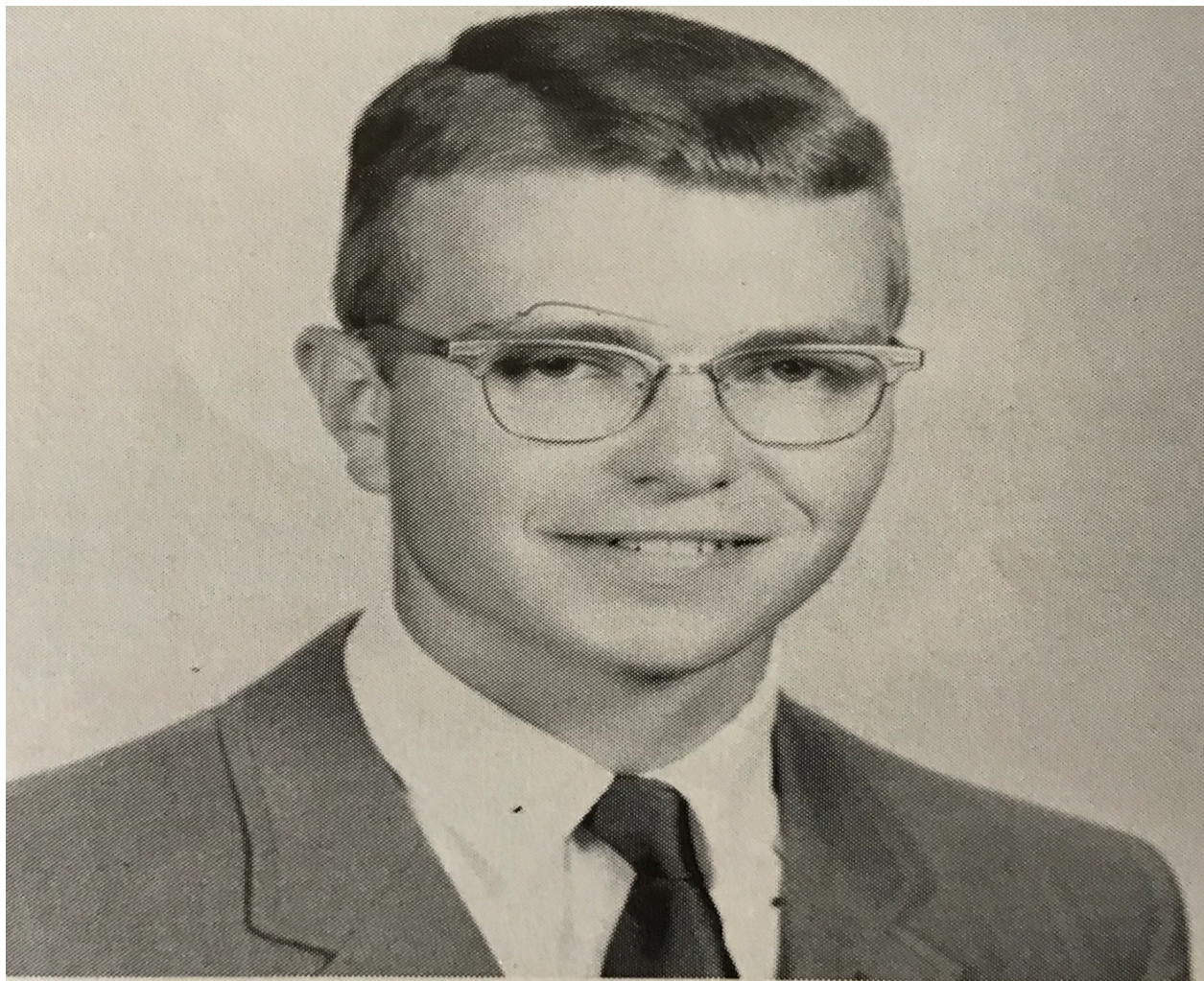
It was open to anybody. There were certain rules. I didn't charge anybody. They come up, as long as they kept the noise down - radio and stuff - turn out the lights, be sure everything was picked up, that was great. That's been goin' on ever since way back and I've had some good people. One was Dale Budd. He and Bruce Edgreen, they would come up here and they would push each other. I can't tell, you'd have to be there to see

how they worked out. But Dale there, he was a Pennsylvania wrestling champion. It made me feel so good that he'd come up here to lift.

I have guys that have graduated and now they're bringin' their kids up.

Anytime we needed any help - you know a little project or something like that - everybody was always willing to help and that was so nice about that. It's always nice to have them kind of people around when you need them.

*The information gathered for this article was collected in a taped interview at Mr. Goochee's home in Port Allegany. The Port Allegany School District thanks him for his time, assistance, and hospitality with our 'Alumni of the Month' feature.



James E. Goochee

