



## Edwin W. "Ed" Lukens

December 9, 1921 - January 24, 2019

Edwin W. Lukens, beloved coach, teacher, writer, and front-porch philosopher passed away peacefully on January 24, 2019, at the age of 97. Born on December 9, 1921, to Randolph and Grace (Grove) Lukens, Ed grew up in Skunk City, on the west side of Syracuse, where he fished in Woodlawn Reservoir, played football with the Brights and the Learys, and hunted deer and woodchuck and raised rabbits for food during the Great Depression. He attended Central Tech High School, where he was a standout in track & field, his senior-year long-jump of 22'11" topping the nation's high-schoolers and earning him several college scholarship offers.

But WWII intervened, and after graduating from Central Tech in 1942, Ed enlisted in the US Army. He served as a Telephone Operator in the 948th Signal Service Company in North Africa and Italy, and he was near Rome when the war ended. During the six months before he was shipped back stateside, Ed read widely and participated in several inter-military track meets, where he was once given a pair of track shoes by a British officer who took pity on a man running barefoot on a cinder track. Ed also toured the Vatican, where he received the Pontiff's personal thanks for his service.

After being honorably discharged on November 30, 1945, Ed enrolled in Syracuse University, where he returned to track & field, going undefeated during his final two years in his two best events, javelin and long-jump. Upon graduation 1950, Ed became a successful teacher and well-respected coach at his high school alma mater. During his tenure at Tech, Ed coached the basketball team to an undefeated season, winning the City Championship game against the top parochial school in front of a sold-out crowd in the Onondaga War Memorial. During the summers, when classes were not in session, Ed dug commercial gas lines, hunted for uranium in Canada, and continued to fish every chance he got.

"Coach" moved to Westhill High School in the late 60s, sharing his calm demeanor and coaching talents with a new community of students and athletes in his physical education classes and on varsity sports teams, which won several sectional titles. He coached

cross-country in the fall, outdoor track in the spring, and indoor track in the winter, the last existing mainly because Ed pestered SU into opening Manley Field House and its too-short banked track to high school runners, jumpers, and shot putters. Ed initiated track & field programs for city and local area youth, and he officiated at youth, scholastic, and collegiate meets for decades.

Although Ed never married or had children of his own, many of his former students recall moving personal interactions with the man they called “Coach,” and they still consider him a major influence in their lives. His former “rummies,” as he called them, have gone on to great success in several fields: academia (countless PhDs), the fine arts (painters, sketchers and high school department heads), the military (graduates from each of the academies as well as a four-star general), politics (a White House advisor to several presidents), and business (the heads of several corporations).

Ed was an avid outdoorsman, athlete, and writer. Before retiring, he moved to Skaneateles, where he speculated in land development, canoed and fished the Lake in the spring, and fished through its ice in the winter. As a minority-owner in a wilderness fishing lodge on the Caniapiscau River in northern Quebec, Ed spent many summers guiding its clients, and he was featured in several articles that appeared in *Outdoor Life* magazine.

Around the time of his retirement, Ed began competing in local Masters Track & Field meets and found that he retained an advantage over athletes his own age. As a member of the Syracuse Chargers for more than 30 years, Ed set 48 records in six different age divisions, including a dozen world marks. In 2002, competing in the 80-84 age group at the National Championships in Boston, Ed won four gold medals and set three world records: in the 60-meter hurdles, the long jump, and the triple jump. Six times Ed was named the Outstanding Track & Field Athlete in his age group. He has been inducted into the USA Masters Track & Field Hall of Fame, as well as the Greater Syracuse Sports Hall of Fame. Track & field took him to cities in Australia, South Africa, and Europe, although his favorite place to compete remained Madison Square Garden in New York City. Ed retired from competition at the age of 85, because, as he explained, “It got too easy. All I had to do was trip forward and someone would hang a medal around my neck.”

As a teacher and coach, Ed was a generous supporter of students, athletes, colleagues, friends, and relatives, as well as the occasional stranger. In retirement, Ed continued to support various humanitarian causes, the Syracuse Chargers, and Syracuse University, which honored him with its “Letterman of Distinction” award in 1995.

Ed's short stories, often not-so-thinly-veiled non-fiction, were printed in newspapers and outdoor publications. They featured life during the Great Depression, life in the Labrador wilderness, float-plane crashes, the occasional death, competitive sports, and the often unrecorded details of everyday life in Onondaga County. When Ed was 92, good friend Dave Reed collected and published Ed's essays and short stories in a book bearing the title *Words of Wisdom: From Skunk City to Skaneateles*. His first book-signing was held, appropriately, at Vernak Farms Country Store in Borodino, where every Saturday morning Ed could be found sharing coffee with 'the boys' and solving the world's problems. Profits were earmarked for Westhill High School and the book was a success, drawing former students and classmates from both Central Tech and Westhill, as well as good neighbors and old friends.

Ed's life is perhaps best summed up in a line from a speech that he delivered to the Westhill Senior Class of 1978: "People grow old by deserting their ideals. Years wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul. . . There is not a person here but has in his power to leave as a heritage to those that follow, the grandest thing on earth – character." Ed's character was evident to all who knew him, and it was featured prominently in articles written about him by former local reporter and chronicler Sean Kirst.

A special thank-you to the staff at Peregrine Senior Living at Onondaga Hill, whose attentive care provided great comfort in the last months of Ed's life. Ed was predeceased by his older brother Randolph in 2012, and he is survived by his brother's four children, Ed's own nephews and nieces: James Lukens of Amesbury MA, Thomas Lukens of Viroqua WI, Jane Walma of White Cloud MI, and Sara Christman of Oxford OH – along with the countless many he influenced throughout his long life.

Calling hours will be April 27th from 1 to 5 pm at the B.L. Bush & Sons Funeral Home, 10 Genesee St. in the village of Camillus.

Please share your condolences and sign Ed's guestbook at [www.BLBUSH.com](http://www.BLBUSH.com)

Published Stories on Ed over the years

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SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY LETTER WINNER OF DISTINCTION, 1995

[https://cuse.com/sports/2007/4/2/lukensedwin\\_lwdbio.aspx](https://cuse.com/sports/2007/4/2/lukensedwin_lwdbio.aspx)

EDWIN W. LUKENS

Track & Field, 1950

## 1995 Letterwinner of Distinction

In high school, Ed Lukens was a Section III champion and set a Niagara District AAU javelin record. He excelled in track at SU in the long jump and javelin. Ed's team was undefeated for two years in dual and triangular meets.

Ed enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942 and served three and a half years, primarily in Africa and Italy.

For 26 years Ed was a distinguished high school teacher and coach in the Syracuse city school district and in the county school system. He coached indoor track, outdoor track and basketball teams to Section III titles and a basketball team to the outstanding all-sports team in Central New York award. Ed initiated summer track youth programs on the city area and state levels and introduced high school track meets to Manley Field House. He has served as an official, officer and committee member of various track meets and track organizations in Central New York. Ed is an officer and member of the Syracuse Coaches Association and a member of the Syracuse Chargers Track and Field Committee.

Ed has been the recipient of the New York State coaches Honor Award, the Onondaga High School League coaches Award and the Y.M.C.A. Community Physical Fitness Award. He was honored at the Big East Championship for his contributions to the SU track program.

Among Ed's involvements are the V.F.W., American Legion, American Vets, Heritage Foundation, Concord Coalition, Common Cause, Salvation Army, Citizens Against Waste and other local charities.

As a masters competitor with the Syracuse Chargers Track Club, Ed has won national titles and set world marks in the hurdles and triple jump. He was voted National Masters Outstanding Field Athlete three times and received the Syracuse Chargers Outstanding Male Athlete award.

Ed belongs to the CNY Alumni Association, Varsity Club, Strider Fund and Society of Fellows. He is major contributor for endowed track and cross country scholarships through the Student Athlete Fund.

Greater Syracuse Sports Hall of Fame

Ed Lukens

Track & Field

Enshrined 2003

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For Ed Lukens, it all started in high school at Syracuse's famed Central High. It was there Lukens discovered the thrill of victory competing in numerous track and field events. After

graduating from Central the year World War II started, he enlisted in the Army. He served in Africa and Italy before coming home to resume his education at Syracuse University. As an impressive long jumper and javelin hurler at Central High, he had no problem earning a position on the SU track team, where he went undefeated for two years.

Lukens coached indoor track, outdoor track and basketball at Central and Westhill, winning numerous Section III titles. He also initiated summer track youth programs for the city, region and state and was instrumental in bringing high school track meets to Manley Field House. For decades, Lukens officiated at scholastic, collegiate and Syracuse Chargers track events.

Lukens began running and competing in adult programs when he was 55. He has set 48 records in six age divisions with the Syracuse Chargers and has established many national and world marks.

In 2002, Lukens set three world records in the men's 80-84 age group at the USA Masters Track & Field Championships in Boston. He also won a fourth gold medal in the high jump, clearing 3'9 1/4". He won the 60-meter hurdles in 12.23 seconds, the long jump in 13'2" and the triple jump in 27'-2.45. In March of 2003 at the age of 81, Lukens bettered his triple jump mark with a 28'-4 1/2" leap.

Lukens has been inducted into the Masters National Track and Field Association Hall of Fame and was named the Outstanding Track & Field Athlete in his age category six times.

#### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

1950: Graduated SU a degree in Physical Education and Science and began his teaching career, which lasted over a quarter of a century

1998: Received SU's Letterman of Distinction

2002: Set three world records in the men's 80-84 division (60m hurdles, long jump and triple jump)

Other awards and honors:

Lukens was the recipient of the New York State Coaches Honor Award, the Onondaga High School League Coaches Award and the Y.M.C.A. Community Physical Fitness Award. The Big East recently honored Lukens for his contributions to the SU track program.

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Honoring a timeless coaching legacy: Ed Lukens helped teens learn 'how to carry on'

By Sean Kirst | [skirst@syracuse.com](mailto:skirst@syracuse.com) , January 08, 2013

Ed Lukens with scrapbooks and memories at his Skaneateles home: Decades after his retirement as an educator, many students he coached or taught still remain in touch. Stephen D. Cannerelli/The Post-Standard

Karen Duncan answered the phone Sunday at her home in Springfield, Ohio, where a painful form of Parkinson's disease has taken away most of her husband Ron's physical mobility. When Karen told Ron a caller had some questions about an old friend named Ed Lukens, Ron asked his wife to hold the phone to his ear.

More than 50 years ago, Ron was a teen headed for trouble in Syracuse. His behavior in middle school had gotten him kicked out of Bellevue Academy. The city school district offered one last chance: Ron could enroll in the old Central High School, but if he landed in any trouble, he'd be gone.

Ron's hostility was undiminished. Looking back on it, he was on the brink of mistakes that could have sent his life downhill. At that critical moment, he met Lukens, a physical education teacher and head coach of Central's basketball, track and cross-country teams. "He changed me," Ron said by telephone, in a voice so soft it was difficult to hear. "He told me I could be something."

Ron evolved into a football and basketball star. He would go on to play for the Cleveland Browns of the National Football League, before building a career as a financial planner. He traces that success to a teenage crossroads, and a quiet coach at Central who sensed his turmoil. "Ed Lukens," said Karen Duncan, "is an amazing, amazing man."

That devotion will be reaffirmed this week by many graying Central alumni. After two years of construction, students have returned to the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, a city high school located alongside the empty downtown landmark that once housed Central High.

Friday, just before a basketball game between the Institute of Technology and Marcellus, Lukens and Manny Breland, another legendary coach, will be among those honored at a 6:15 p.m. celebration of Central's heritage in the new school gymnasium.

From his Skaneateles home, Lukens, 91, expressed discomfort at the notion. "Don't pat me on the back too much," he said. Those who love him say that would be impossible. As a young man at Central, Lukens — a track star — never played scholastic basketball.

Years later, when he was asked to coach the school basketball team, he read everything he could about the sport, showed up at clinics thrown by coaching masters and helped build Central's reputation as a power. He also coached the running sports at Central and later at Westhill, before he retired in the late 1970s.

The back rooms of his house are dominated by keepsakes and trophies, both from

coaching and from his decades of achievement as a record-setting competitor in masters track and field. Still, the most powerful monument is a thick stack of Christmas cards that Lukens brought to his kitchen table. The cards offered messages from dozens of grown men, many of retirement age. Note after note thanked Lukens for his patience, concern and inspiration.

"The only way I can put it is to say he was a Godly man," said Dick Nagy, who played for Lukens at Central and went on to a long career in college coaching. "The longer you live, the more you realize what some folks have done for you. Lukens — always "Mr. Lukens" to his players — didn't curse. Those who played for him say they can't recall him growing angry. He had an uncanny awareness of teens dealing with trouble in their homes. And his biggest imperative, always, was to help students find a way to go to college.

"I don't know," Lukens said. "I just think, as a coach, you'd better be even-minded. I just asked them to use their own brains, to know what's right and to do what's right. You want them, when school's over, to know how to carry on."

That view was shaped by his own experience. His mother and father struggled to get by in the Great Depression. Lukens learned what it meant to be hungry; for a time, food grew so short the boy was sent to live with his grandparents. The sense of hurt, of vulnerability, only intensified when Lukens survived combat in Africa and Italy during World War II. "I don't know if I ever really laughed again after what I saw in the war," Lukens said.

Those he taught or coached, including Tim Cowin, recall his deep compassion. In the 1960s, after Cowin's parents divorced, his mother brought the family to Syracuse. She was seriously ill. The weight of caring for the younger siblings fell on Cowin, the oldest child, who assumed no one outside his house could really understand. That changed when he competed for a gentle coach at Central.

"He's one of the most principled and honorable guys I've ever met," said Cowin, now commissioner of corrections for Onondaga County. "When I needed guidance, he was there to give it, and he always had some little story that fit the moment." Lukens never married. One of his great regrets is that he never had children "who could have been better than I am."

Even so, many of his student-athletes say his impact bordered on paternal. You hear it in the memories of Larry Gilbert of Camillus, who played basketball at Central. Or Gen. Keith Alexander, now director of the National Security Agency, who ran for Lukens at Westhill. Or David Reed, among those who still meet Lukens to tell stories and drink coffee. Or Bob Niedzwiecki (Ned-ZWICK-y), a longtime Syracuse artist and a retired teacher, who recalls how he lost his best friend in a drowning when they were children in middle school.

Niedzwiecki felt utterly lost. One day, he went for a solitary run on Westhill's track. Lukens, as if somehow aware of the boy's sorrow, approached and casually asked if he'd consider distance running. To Niedzwiecki, who became a fine runner, many of the best things in

his life grew out of that moment. “You felt the good in him,” Niedzwiecki said, “and you were drawn to it.”

That aura of selflessness also resonates with Billy Owens, a basketball standout at Central whose overtime jump shot against Rome Free Academy in 1961 gave the school — and Lukens — a sectional championship. The bronze trophy was impressive, shaped like a basketball, and it ended up in an honored place in a school trophy case.

In the mid-1970s, school administrators decided to close Central. Owens cringes when he recalls how many of the school’s trophies and awards were tossed away. Somehow, Lukens managed to rescue the sectional trophy. He could have kept it as a memento of one of the great accomplishments in his career. Instead, he insisted on giving it to Owens, who still has the trophy on his mantle. “I will always treasure Mr. Lukens,” Owens said.

Ed Lukens, running the hurdles in 1987 as a 65-year-old masters competitor. Stephen D. Cannerelli/The Post-Standard

As for Ron Duncan, now in the hospice stage of Parkinson’s in Ohio, one of his favorite stories involves the day when his coach told him he ought to leave. Under Lukens’ tutelage, Ron had become a star athlete. At the beginning of his junior year, his father accepted a new job in New Jersey. Ron rebelled. He didn’t want to move. He found a cousin in Syracuse willing to put him up, and he told Lukens it would be a way for him to play for Central.

Imagine that scenario today, in an era when so many standout athletes live with friends or relatives as a means of becoming eligible to play for elite high schools. Ron went to Lukens and offered to stay nearby, giving his coach a chance to hang onto one of his key players. Lukens said no.

“Maybe if it had been halfway through his senior year, it would have had made sense,” Lukens said. “But he was only a junior, and he was young, and his place was with his mother and father.”

Ron left for New Jersey with his family. He became one of the great athletes in the history of Glen Rock High School, and he went on to college and the NFL. Sunday, despite throat muscles stiffened and constricted by Parkinson’s, Ron asked his wife to hold the phone to his mouth so he could offer the best words he knew to fit Ed Lukens.

In little more than a whisper, Ron said, “He means the world to me.”

Sean Kirst is a columnist with The Post-Standard

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Correspondence: Ed Lukens as great man, great friend, great coach

[http://www.syracuse.com/kirst/index.ssf/2013/01/correspondence\\_ed\\_lukens\\_as\\_gr.html](http://www.syracuse.com/kirst/index.ssf/2013/01/correspondence_ed_lukens_as_gr.html)

By Sean Kirst | skirst@syracuse.com , on January 10, 2013

Ed Lukens, with a lifetime's worth of sporting memories at his Skaneateles home. Stephen D. Cannerelli/The Post-Standard

Wednesday's column on 91-year-old Ed Lukens triggered a flood of calls and notes from former students and athletes who knew him many decades ago, during his teaching and coaching career at Central Tech and at Westhill. Some of the tales from grown men whose lives he changed were so personal, and emotionally intense, they can't be used.

More comments can be found following the column itself. A reception for Lukens and Manny Breland, another coaching legend from Central, will be held at 6:15 p.m. Friday in the new gymnasium at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, 258 E. Adams St., Syracuse; tours and a reception at the renovated school begin at 4:15 p.m.

- Sean

A note from Andris Kalnins, a Central graduate who works in the White House Office of Administration; he is responsible for financial policy and serves as senior financial advisor to the Executive Office of the Presidential Chief Financial Officer ...

Mr. Lukens would encourage all students to join the track/cross country and indoor track teams with some amazing results. Going from newcomer to track scholarship was the goal he set for many of us – and yes, the track scholarships came many times, based on Mr. Lukens' personal endorsement.

He gave all of himself to the young athletes, including transportation to Kirk Park for practice – funded by Mr. Lukens personally driving athletes all over Central New York. But his biggest gift to young athletes was encouragement to everyone to build character, sportsmanship, to practice harder every day, and to learn from teammates to respect each other before diversity was cool.

He was cool and way ahead of his time, leaving lasting memories of how to achieve goals by working hard to be a complete person, both as a student and athlete. That confidence that was developed in the teen years is still paying dividends - knowing that anything can be achieved with a positive attitude, honesty and determination.

Those lessons are still in my DNA and serve me well daily. At his current stage in life, he continues to amaze me with his determination to be relevant and still giving words of encouragement to the thousands of student/athletes he mentored and made believe that anything was possible – if you can dream it you can achieve it.

From Rich Street to Pennsylvania Avenue – flying out of Syracuse on Air Force I on the same plane as President Clinton was never something that I could have dreamed . . . . but it happened.

Andris Kalnins

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Sean, Tell youwhat: I'd be walking to school on winter days, and it was REALLY a long

walk in those days, and so many times he'd show up and drive us ... and you just knew, on bad mornings, he came looking for some of us when he knew we had to walk.

I remember practicing on that stage at Central (the team played on a court on the stage) where we played our games, and Lincoln Auditorium then was like the Civic Center now ... We'd be practicing and there'd be these great musicians warming up ... once Van Cliburn was on piano while we practiced ... and there'd be times when they'd have circus animals tied up down beneath us. What a time that was ...

Ed Lukens, he was just fantastic: He was a shaper of people's lives. If you had a year's contact with Ed Lukens, you were lucky, because you remember it as a golden year in your life. He was soft-spoken, never swore ... just a great man.

I played from my freshman year, and we'd play on the stage, up above the seats, and the court was one of the only floors in the city that wasn't sealed. It was right above the coal bins in the basement, and the dust would blow up through the cracks onto us during practice, and we used to wear pajamas in practice because it would get all over us.

- Bob Couse

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Mr. Kirst, I read with interest your piece on Ed Lukens, and I want to relate another aspect of Ed's life that is quite interesting.

In the 1960's, Ed spent considerable time exploring the northern reaches of Québec and Labrador for the great fishing it is now known for. Outdoor Life magazine published several articles. The guide on these jaunts was Stan Karbowski, a dear friend and hunting partner of mine from Parish, who died in 2010 at 94 years old. Also along was Bud Carpenter, who owned Carpenter's Hardware in Camden, where I worked as a teenager. My brother Jim owns the store today.

I could go on ... but, as Paul Harvey would say ... now you know the rest of the story.

Enjoy, Joel Plumley

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Sean, I ran track, cross country and played basketball for Coach Lukens in the early 60's at Central Tech. He was a second father to me. He would drive me home after practices, offer me advice about colleges and if I strayed off the road would tell me, "What are you doing, you knucklehead?"

I now live in New Hampshire and through a former teammate heard that Coach Lukens was competing in the National Masters Track and Field Championships in Boston, just an hour away. I made it a point to attend and see the man who helped guide me as I was growing up. As I walked into the Reggie Lewis Center I immediately spotted this late 80's man doing the high jump event. After the event was over, he walked off the track and

toward the stands where I was sitting. Just after he passed me, I spoke up just above the noise of the crowd and said, "Coach Lukens, congratulations on your first place finish." He stopped, turned around, found me in the crowd and said: "Billy Swift what are you doing here?" I hadn't see him since I graduated from Central Tech in 1965, over 40 years ago! Yes, I was amazed he remembered me but I know I will never forget him.

Bill Swift

Amherst, NH

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Wonderful article, Sean - I remember him from when my family moved from Saranac Lake to Syracuse in 1943 - and except for a few years in New Jersey, lived somewhere on the west end ...I always heard that he was a great coach and a great guy. Now, after reading your column. I know why. Thanks,

Mark Capone

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Dear Mr. Kirst, Thank you for your article on Mr. Lukens. His low-key guidance favorably influenced the character of many Central Tech students. In the '60's it was named "Syracuse Central Technical High School."

In response to Sputnik, the Syracuse City School District was on the cutting edge by establishing a technical high school. I started there in 9th grade. There were 60 very bright students from all over Onondaga County in the 9th grade class. To enter, we had to pass an entrance exam. We had no study halls; they crammed in advanced classes in the sciences and even Russian. Many of my fellow classmates went on to make significant contributions to their chosen technical fields.

- Robert Shanebrook

Central Tech Class of 1964

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ITC welcomes back alumni from Syracuse Central, Syracuse Tech to see new gymnasium and school

<http://highschoolsports.syracuse.com/news/article/-6532702073197909593/itc-welcomes-back-alumni-from-syracuse-central-syracuse-tech-to-see-new-gymnasium-and-school/>

By Donnie Webb/The Post-Standard , on January 10, 2013 11:39 AM, updated August 22, 2013 8:36 PM

There are two empty trophy cases positioned on each side of several doors leading into the brand new gymnasium at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central along

downtown's southern edge. Friday night, the Syracuse city high school will be given an old trophy for one of its new display cases as part of a homecoming celebration. Before there was ITC, there was Syracuse Central and Syracuse Tech. The grand old school building sits vacant on the opposite side of the renovated school now housing ITC.

To bridge the old and the new, ITC is hosting something of a homecoming Friday night for Syracuse Tech and Syracuse Central graduates along its own two graduating classes, who never got to attend classes in the renovated building or play athletics in the new gymnasium. In turn, representatives of Syracuse Tech plan to present ITC with their school's 1960 trophy for winning the city basketball championship.

Former Syracuse Tech coach Ed Lukens and former Syracuse Central High School and Syracuse University basketball star Manny Breland will participate in a ceremony at 6:30 p.m. in the school's new gym before ITC's home basketball game on Friday night against Marcellus. Both are to be honored as a symbol of Tech's successful past. Post-Standard columnist Sean Kirst provided a wonderful profile of Lukens Tuesday.

The school also plans to honor its first two graduating classes, who spent their time in the old Levy Middle School building while ITC's permanent home was being renovated and built. The new gymnasium is a totally new facility. The ceiling has red beams and blue duct work. The walls are pristine white with blue and gray padding against the walls and blue seats for about 600 spectators. There is also a new logo at the center court jump circle with the school mascot (the Eagle) and its school initials.

"Got a good feeling inside," said ITC junior forward Sayzar Jones. "We finally got our own logo. It's better than having another gym's logo. We finally get to have our own gym class in our own class." "In terms of building school pride, it's been enormous," said ITC boys basketball coach Joe Boronczyk. "Last year, we had to travel for practice, travel for home games. It's like we played all away games. So just in terms of a school community, to have a home, tremendous."

For the school basketball team's debut in the new gym this season against the Syracuse Academy of Science, Boronczyk said the facility was packed and fans had to be turned away. School officials say the celebration Friday night is a way for past and recent graduates to connect with the school.

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[https://www.syracuse.com/kirst/index.ssf/2013/01/post\\_398.html](https://www.syracuse.com/kirst/index.ssf/2013/01/post_398.html)

Ed Lukens and the Central reunion: At 91, a coaching model for tomorrow

By Sean Kirst, [skirst@syracuse.com](mailto:skirst@syracuse.com), Posted Jan 13, 2013

Ed Lukens, with Bob Piraino of the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, addresses the crowd at a reunion and celebration Friday at the school. Courtesy ITC/Photo by Mikaela David

I stopped in Friday night at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central for the big celebration of the newly completed school renovations. About 100 graying alumni of the old Central Tech showed up to mingle with today's students, gathering in a brand-new gymnasium for a ceremony just before ITC played Marcellus in varsity boys basketball. The big draws for the occasion were Ed Lukens and Manny Breland, who were both standout athletes at the old Central, and then went on to become legend-ary coaches. "Rock stars," is the way Bob Piraino, an ITC teacher and master of ceremonies, referred to the way they were greeted Friday in the halls. They received a standing ovation from the crowd. Larry Gilbert, who played basketball for Lukens at Central, donated a championship trophy from 1960 to ITC.

And Billy Owens - who led Central to a sectional basketball championship in 1961 - said he and other graduates would be happy to come back and serve as mentors, in the way Lukens and Breland mentored so many students in their time. The event was all about hope, which Lukens, 91, noted when he addressed the crowd; he said he felt a spirit at ITC that was similar to the atmosphere at Central, in its glory days. His feeling is borne out statistically - the ITC graduation rate is close to 80 percent, which makes it a scholastic beacon in the city - but Lukens himself represents a deeper, all-too-rare and much-needed element of education.

I had written a column about Lukens, and the impact he had on generations of student-athletes, that appeared a few days before the ceremony. The back story on the piece: Over the years, several readers had urged me to write about Lukens and his legacy. One of the most passionate requests came from a Syracuse lawyer, David Reed. Not long ago, I wrote about former Syracuse University and National Football League standout Joe Ehrmann. He's on a national campaign to change the whole educational approach and emphasis on coaching.

In his book or when he speaks, Ehrmann asks a few simple questions of his audience: Do you remember the coaches you had when you were young? If so, what kind of impact did they have on your lives? Did they make you feel better about yourself? Did they inspire you to work harder, to sacrifice for others, to be a better person? Did they expect you to show respect to officials and opposing athletes and coaches? Or do you cringe when you remember the experience, if you remember it all? Were your coaches caustic, sarcastic, profane, distant, belittling, single-minded about winning ... all behind the notion that ripping down children and teenagers, who are typically fragile and insecure already, is somehow a means of "building character"?

Think about it, Ehrmann will ask: Did you put your coach out of your mind as soon as the sport was over, or did you ever have a coach who really changed your life for the better?

He describes great coaches as "transformational," although he notes that many of us may never be lucky enough to play for one. Few educators have the opportunity to influence the direction of young women and men in the way of a coach, Ehrmann says, yet that opportunity is too often missed or passed over in American schools. Upon reading the column about Ehrmann and his quest, Reed immediately contacted me and said: The living example of what he means is Ed Lukens.

Reed ran for Lukens at Westhill. He recalls him as a powerful counterweight to the whole despise-your-opponent, winning-is-everything approach to sports. His memories of Lukens were reinforced by those I interviewed for a column about the coach, and by the many calls and notes I received after that piece appeared. Reader after reader told me that Lukens had a sixth sense about young people struggling with hard times at home. They told me Lukens saw the importance in giving time to all his student-athletes, whether they were stars or on the bench; that he taught in a gentle way, without embarrassing or humiliating his students; that he had a gift for listening, and he would assess a situation and try to offer fitting advice; and that in the end - maybe far more than he realized himself - he played a role in changing countless lives.

As Bob Couse, one of his basketball players put it, a year with a Lukens was "a golden year in your life." In other words, using Ehrmann's definition, Lukens was a transformational coach. At 91, Lukens moved with grace Friday through the crowd at ITC. Asked to make a few remarks, he did it beautifully - as you'd expect - and ended by asking everyone in the crowd to take "good, good care" of themselves. Yet the real meaning of the night was not about nostalgia: Lukens, even in his 90s, is hardly a symbol of the past. He is a symbol of education, and how to make it work. - Sean

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On a day set aside to honor Dr. King, remembering his Syracuse speech about the crisis in Northern schools

[http://www.syracuse.com/kirst/index.ssf/2013/01/on\\_mlk\\_day\\_in\\_cny\\_remembering.html](http://www.syracuse.com/kirst/index.ssf/2013/01/on_mlk_day_in_cny_remembering.html)

By Sean Kirst | [skirst@syracuse.com](mailto:skirst@syracuse.com) , on January 20, 2013 at 10:52 PM, updated at 11:00 PM

Handshake between Manny Breland and Ed Lukens, old friends and beloved coaches at the old Central Tech in Syracuse, who saw each other this month - for the first time in years - during a ceremony at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central. Courtesy of Mikaela David, ITC

Monday is set aside as a day of honor for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Across the nation, communities will celebrate the campaign, galvanized by King, that led to the sequence of Civil Rights laws that finally ended centuries of legal discrimination, based on race, in America.

Central New York teachers, looking for something of compelling local interest to share this week with high school or middle school students, might want to touch on this element: In 1965, as we've discussed before, King came to Syracuse University and offered an important speech - you can read it here - on what he described as escalating repercussions from "Jim Crow schools" in the North.

Almost 50 years later, the address - still more obscure than many of King's speeches - rings out in some ways as a piece of prophecy.

Unless overwhelming patterns of de facto segregation ended in Northern schools, King warned, the result would be to create new generations of "derelicts and dropouts who renew and deepen the ugly process of deprivation and waste." The cause of that segregation, King said - in a statement as true today as it was in 1965 - "is so complex that many run from it because the enormity of it overwhelms them."

A simple question to contemplate on the day named in King's honor: If he could somehow walk through greater Syracuse today, and if he were to see the existing enrollment trends for schools in Syracuse and Onondaga County, would he feel as if anything had really changed?

- Sean

JFK assassination: For the OHA, the full collective archive of reader grief, loss and shock  
By Sean Kirst | skirst@syracuse.com , November 22, 2013, updated February 12, 2015 at 2:23 PM

A lawyer who heard the news in the middle of a jury trial. Servicemen who feared the outbreak of nuclear war. Young mothers who tried to hold their composure in front of little children. Relationships forged and strengthened amid grief. What follows is the outpouring of notes and letters from Central New Yorkers sent to The Post-Standard in the past month, after I asked readers: Where were you when you learned John F. Kennedy had died?

At the end of today - after exactly 50 years, on another late November Friday - we'll share this collection with the Onondaga Historical Association. If you'd like to add your own memory, for the OHA archives, the easiest way is to do it as a signed comment, below. Or you can email me today at skirst@syracuse.com . Most of all, thanks to everyone willing to share the passionate reflections . . . :

Don Birdseye, Juneau, Alaska:

I was a 16-year-old junior at Syracuse Central Tech High School, enrolled in the Tech Physics tract, along with about a dozen other boys who moved as a group from class to

class every day. Between periods (we had just left French class, on the way to PE), classmate George Backus asked if I'd heard that President Kennedy had been shot in Dallas. George was the jokester of our group, and I was still waiting for the punchline when we reached the gym. Word spread not to change into gym clothes, and we were told to line up along the basketball court sideline. Men's basketball coach Ed Lukens came onto the court, and stated, "Gentlemen, the President of the United States is dead." It was like being slapped upside the head with my first instance of adulthood.

School was dismissed. As I made my way to Salina Street to catch the bus home, up at the other end of downtown, a large number of people were massing. I was told that the entire class of Central Tech senior boys were enlisting at the various military recruiting stations located on Clinton Square. While that particular rumor proved not to be true, I remember wishing that I was old enough to enlist.

I worked for the federal government in downtown Dallas most of my adult life. The last seven years, my office overlooked Dealey Plaza. From my office window, I could look directly into the sixth floor window of the Texas Book Depository. I spent as much time out in the field as I could to avoid the view.

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Fantasy series kicks off in Baldwinsville: Central New York books and authors

By Nicki Gorny, Contributing writer, Updated January 9, 2015 at 2:41 PM

A Baldwinsville backyard appears in one locally authored book while a Skaneateles resident offers words of wisdom in another. These show just two of the ways Central New York writers weave a regional influence into their work. . . . .

"Words of Wisdom: From Skunk City to Skaneateles," by Ed Lukens

When 93-year-old Skaneateles resident Ed Lukens quit competing in track and field events in his late 80s, it wasn't because running and jumping had become too difficult for the world record holder. Rather, they had become too easy. "All I had to do was trip forward and someone wanted to hang a medal around my neck," Lukens had explained to Dave Reed, whom he had coached at Westhill High School in the early 1970s.

The locally renown Lukens, who coached track and basketball at Central and Westhill high schools for years after graduating Syracuse University in 1950, is highlighted in the recently published "Words of Wisdom: From Skunk City to Skaneateles." Reed, who compiled the book, explained that it includes short stories, essays, speeches and even songs written by Lukens, with each piece reflecting part of Lukens' colorful life.

The book covers Lukens' summers spent as a fishing guide in northern Canada, for example, as well as his athletic accomplishments as a coach and individual. He began competing in masters track and field at age 55 through the Syracuse Chargers, and in 2002 secured three world records in his age group in just one competition.

Published in December, "Words of Wisdom" is available online or at Skaneateles' Vernak Farms County Store, which will additionally host a book signing on Jan. 31 between 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. A portion of book sale proceeds will benefit the Westhill Central School District Educational Foundation.

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In defense of Jim Boeheim, in praise of Ed Lukens. . .

[http://www.syracuse.com/poliquin/index.ssf/2015/01/readers\\_emails\\_1.html](http://www.syracuse.com/poliquin/index.ssf/2015/01/readers_emails_1.html)

By Bud Poliquin | [bpoliquin@syracuse.com](mailto:bpoliquin@syracuse.com) , on January 05, 2015 at 4:00 PM, updated at 3:52 PM

Syracuse, N.Y. — As promised, at this time in every week this is (mostly) your space and (mostly) your space only. Which means I plan to sit back, put my feet up and (mostly) let you do the heavy lifting. Have you got something that you'd like to say ... um, write? Well, here's your chance and here's your forum — every Monday. . . . Today's batch? Well, it's got a pinch of Jim Boeheim, a dash of Ed Lukens . . . .

“Bud - Regarding your recent "Top 10" series, I couldn't let the opportunity pass without suggesting that you overlooked Edwin Lukens. Sean Kirst has written him up several times in recent years, focusing on the impact Ed had on those thousands of athletes he coached at Central Tech in the '60s and at Westhill in the '70s.

“Meanwhile, Ed is a Syracuse University Letter winner of Distinction and member of the Syracuse Sports Hall of Fame. He also meets your criteria because he grew up in Skunk City. What is not as well known about Ed, and why I think he merits consideration, is this: He holds more world records than anyone else on your list. Check him out on the International Master Track & Field website and you'll see that between his 50s-80s Ed competed internationally, setting records regularly, often multiple times, in a single meet.

“He turned 93 last month and no longer competes. As he told me several years ago:

"Reedy-boy, it just got too easy. It seemed like all I had to do was trip forward and someone wanted to hang a medal around my neck." Ed hasn't slowed down, however. He still heats his house with wood from trees he cuts down and last month he published his first collection of the short stories he has written over the past 50 years. It's called "Words of Wisdom: From Skunk City to Skaneateles."

“Thanks again for undertaking the difficult task of selecting Central New York's most accomplished athletes. Maybe you'll get enough suggestions for a second group!”

-- Dave Reed

Syracuse, N.Y.

B.P.: So, is that the secret, Dave? If I want to enjoy a robust old age, must I chop wood? Couldn't I just put on another layer, wait out the winter and play more golf in the spring?

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Syracuse Newspaper

To the Editor:

Recently, Syracuse lost a great man in Coach Edwin Lukens, who passed away Jan. 29, 2019. Many articles have been written about his athletic accomplishments and positive impact on his students, athletes and the running community. I had the honor of running for Coach over many seasons at Westhill Junior-Senior High School. Coach “Luke” had a John “Woodenesque” style, from inspirational quotes hung in the locker room to a total caring for all his athletes, no matter if they were the best or mediocre. In this era of over-inflated egos, the world needs the lessons of Coach. His athletic ability was only surpassed by his modesty, kindness and determination to succeed, whatever the circumstances.

After graduation, I visited coach every day in my mind in a “Tuesdays With Morrie” manner. As a public school educator and adjunct professor, I imparted in my students, athletes and club members the lessons learned from Coach. Recently, I had the pleasure of reconnecting with Coach in person at Peregrine Senior Living at Onondaga Hill. My weekly visits with coach for the last six months were mostly on Fridays, reminiscing about the past, sharing pictures and stories and reminding him of the “rummies” he coached. It is an experience that will last for me forever.

If we do an “accounting” of Coach’s life, the multitude of students that he impacted spreads exponentially, as his learnings and teachings are passed on to their children, students, athletes and every person they encounter for generations to come.

Mitch Albom, the author of “Tuesdays With Morrie,” said it best: “Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine? If you are lucky enough to find your way to such teachers, you will always find your way back. Sometimes it is only in your head. Sometimes it is right alongside their beds.”

Joseph J. Priola  
Westhill, Class of 1975

Forever one of Coach Lukens' "Rummies"  
Fairport

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# Events

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**APR**   **Visitation**   01:00PM - 05:00PM

**27**

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B.L. Bush & Sons Funeral Home

10 W. Genesee Street, Camillus, NY, US, 13031

# Comments

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“ 1 file added to the album Track Meet



**B.L. Bush & Sons Funeral Home / Monuments** - October 21, 2020 at 02:15 AM

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“ 1 file added to the album Fishing Trip



**B.L. Bush & Sons Funeral Home / Monuments** - October 21, 2020 at 02:12 AM

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“ Mr.ed it was a blessing to be one of your caregivers ,I read your book all the time ! I'll always remember just sitting with you for hours listening to all your life stories ! You sure did inspire me ! Just a secret -"u we're a favorite to me "

**Brenda towsley** - June 21, 2019 at 11:58 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Tribute at Funeral Home



**B.L. Bush & Sons Funeral Home / Monuments** - April 29, 2019 at 12:28 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Military Honors



**B.L. Bush & Sons Funeral Home / Monuments** - April 29, 2019 at 12:27 PM

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“ 4 files added to the album Memories Album



**B.L. Bush & Sons Funeral Home / Monuments** - April 27, 2019 at 02:35 PM

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“ 3 files added to the album Memories Album



**B.L. Bush & Sons Funeral Home / Monuments** - March 30, 2019 at 02:30 PM

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“ Condolences to Mr. Lukens family and all my fellow students,  
I met Mr.Lukens when he was my 7th gr. gym teacher.  
Before class he would sit on the hallway floor outside of the locker room  
drinking his bottle of 7up. Over the next 6 years I talked he listened,he told  
stories,I listened.He always had our back, Stick to the simple things,  
face things straight on,be honest.Work hard.help others,  
Seeing Mr.Lukens in later years was a gift,In 1980s-1990s he be working on his  
house in Borodino,I was remodeling the house next door.Sitting in Mr.Lukens kitchen  
having coffee priceless.  
I still call my friends rummies,  
Ken Whiting  
W H '75

ken whiting - February 11, 2019 at 03:58 PM



“ LUUUKE! That's what I remember most about coach Lukens, yelling out his name like we  
were at a Bruce Springsteen concert. He was always a matter of fact kinda guy, and all  
around fun instructor. Rest Easy old Buddy! Thanks for spending quality time with us  
"RUMMIES"!

Greg T. Konder

Greg - February 12, 2019 at 04:50 PM



“ Coach Luke was a great man and I thought of him often over the last forty years. He  
was a true gentleman.  
Brien Montgomery

Brien Montgomery - February 10, 2019 at 09:00 PM



“ Please allow us, the June class of 1955 from Syracuse Central High School to add a  
small message of love and caring for a great man, teacher, coach and friend.  
May he Rest In Peace.



shelly polge - February 10, 2019 at 07:40 PM



“ In the late 50's he was my coach - track and JV football. Great memories! 5 decades later, on a Saturday morning, I walked into Vernak Farms Country Store in Borodino and to my amazement there sat "Coach," head and shoulders taller than the others at his table, looking not all that different than he did "back in the day." We had a most pleasant reminiscence. I left Vernak's with an autographed copy of "Words of Wisdom; From Skunk City to Skaneateles." Ed Lukens was one-of-a-kind. He is esteemed by the legion of us who were blessed that our lives intersected with his. Bob Cornelius, Class of '59, Central High School.

**Bob Cornelius** - February 10, 2019 at 06:27 PM

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“ While I only knew Ed at Peregrine, he was my fathers dinner partner. He was a gentleman to the end. He was stricken with the most unforgiving disease, but had the best of care as does my father. Condolences to your family Ed, May you be at peace. Susan Dettor

**susan dettor** - February 10, 2019 at 01:40 PM

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## “ The Loss of a Great Man, The Continuation of a Great Spirit

Recently, Syracuse lost a great man in Coach Edwin Lukens. Many articles have been written about his athletic accomplishments and positive impact on his students, athletes and the running community. I had the honor of running for coach over many seasons at Westhill Jr. Sr. High School. Coach “Luke” had a John “Woodenesque” style from inspirational quotes hung in the locker room to a total caring of all his athletes, no matter whether they were the best or mediocre. In this era of over-inflated egos, the world needs the lessons of coach, his athletic ability was only surpassed by his modesty, kindness and determination to succeed whatever the circumstances. After graduation, I visited coach every day in my mind in a “Tuesday’s With Morrie” manner. As a public-school educator and adjunct professor, I imparted in my students, athletes, and club members the lessons learned from coach. Recently, I had the pleasure of reconnecting with coach in person at Peregrine Senior Living at Onondaga Hill. My weekly visits with coach for the last six months were mostly on Friday’s, reminiscing about the past, sharing pictures and stories and reminding him of the “rummies” he coached. It is an experience that will last for me forever. If we do an “accounting” of coach’s life, the multitude of students that he impacted, creates an exponential growth of his learnings and teachings in those students passing his lessons on to their children, students, athletes and every person that we encounter for generations to come. Mitch Albom, the author of “Tuesdays With Morrie” said it best,

“Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine? If you are lucky enough to find your way to such teachers, you will always find your way back. Sometimes it is only in your head. Sometimes it is right alongside their beds.”

Joseph J. Priola  
Westhill, Class of ‘75  
Forever One of Coach Lukens “Rummies”



Joseph J Priola - February 10, 2019 at 09:07 AM

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“ As a member of the Central High class of 1957, I was one of the "rum-dums" that Ed coached on the CHS track team and a student in his Chemistry classes. I remember well his unfailing good spirits and encouragement of a would-be track competitor. In the years since, we would bump into each other on rare occasions in the Skaneateles village. His memory will remain and his warm personality will be missed. The world needs more good men like Ed Lukens.

Bruce Kenan

Bruce Kenan - February 10, 2019 at 07:58 AM

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“ The Class of 1961 send condolences to Coach's family and all the students who loved him through the decades. His character and class helped to mold hundreds and hundreds young athletes. Coach will be remember for years to come.

Kathleen Niles-Overton - February 09, 2019 at 05:18 PM

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“ To Ed's family,

I was on the first faculty at Westhill High School when it opened in 1961. When Ed joined our faculty in the late 1960's, he was a welcome addition. He always was a friend to teacher and student alike and his down-to-earth philosophy and operation couldn't be beaten. It was a loss to the school when he retired in 1978, but no one left with a more positive reputation. It was a pleasure to have taught and coached with him. He was a great man, teacher and friend.

Doug Nielsen, Social Studies, Westhill - 1961-1991

Doug Nielsen - February 05, 2019 at 03:08 PM

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“ 4 files added to the album Memories Album



B.L. Bush & Sons Funeral Home / Monuments - February 05, 2019 at 02:27 PM