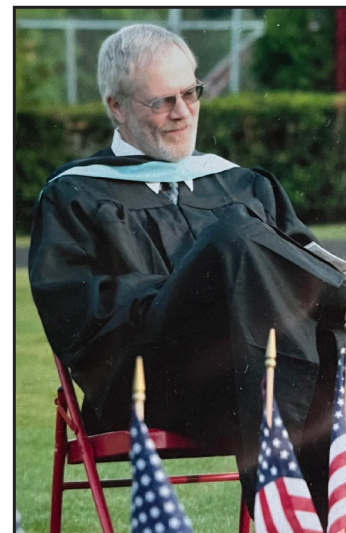
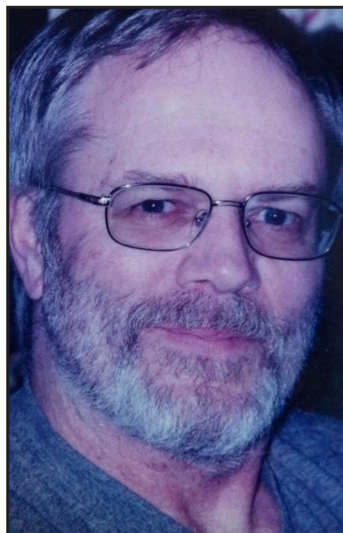
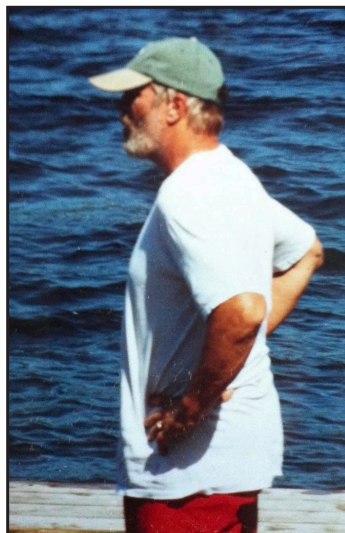
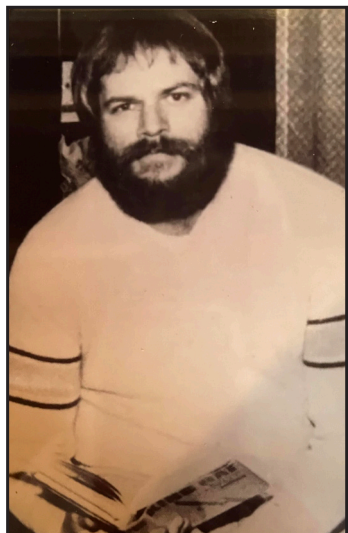


Helping kids find their worth



Bill Ferguson's teaching legacy lives on in dedicated classrooms

Sitting on the desk in front of his English class, Mr. Ferguson would look out over a sea of blank stares. As he would weave personal stories into the lesson, he would literally watch faces light up throughout the room.

"He didn't teach out of a book; he taught out of his mind, and his heart," said his wife of 42 years, Laurie Ferguson. "He wasn't just putting in the hours, he wanted kids to be the best they could be."

For 37 years as an English teacher at Sanford High School, Ferguson was known for his love of Ernest Hemingway and a red pen. "He would put a big red X through entire paragraphs. You would think the kids would be devastated," recalled English teaching colleague Lauren Sonneborn. "But he managed to get his students to embrace it and instill in them a growth mindset. Kids very quickly got over themselves."

Since retired, Bill Ferguson, 75, of Springvale died June 23, 2023. In his memory, thanks to donations from friends and family to the Sanford Schools Legacy Foundation, two classrooms and a library conference room will be named for the high school Honors English teacher; his old classroom that has since become Sanford Middle School, an English classroom at the new high school, and a literary conference room in the SHS library.

This dedication honors Ferg's tremendous sense of humor in the classroom. Through the years, Ferg kept a folder of students' "best" bloopers – typos, mistaken words, phrases and memorable mishaps in student assignments. "That was such a sincere thing. He loved working

with teenagers, he enjoyed helping them grow. Bloopers were an opportunity for them to grow, laugh at themselves and move on," said Sonneborn.

He was very committed to his students. Sonneborn said he would work most summer days, when he would bring in his dog Angus with him to the classroom. He studied recent SAT questions that he would include in new quizzes and vocabulary lists for the coming year.

Ferg loved the written language and using it as self-expression, and he especially loved Hemingway; his wife said he felt a deep connection to the famed author. Bill loved the one-page story "The Old Man at the Bridge," in particular, and Sonneborn still teaches it in her class today.

"He is like the old man on the bridge. I imagine Ferg loved it because he saw himself in the story," said Sonneborn. "It was a metaphor of who he was."

His wife said he often quoted Hemingway, favoring "There is nothing noble about being superior to his man," she said. "He didn't look down on anybody, he helped everyone."

That help extended beyond the classroom. "He would sense something was off in a student and say 'hey, I want to talk with you.' And he'd take them down to Dunkin Donuts and talk with them after school. Or I can't tell you how many times he called them at night just to check in on them."

Laurie said student after student came "out of the woodwork" after he died to recount their stories with

Ferg. At least two students told Laurie during his memorial service, "I'm here because Ferguson talked me out of suicide." "He was the type of person to say I see more in you, and he would help them see that value in themselves," she said.

Other students such as Class of 2012 student Kelsey Roberts credited Mr. Ferguson for pulling her through some tumultuous years.

"I was going through a lot of stuff at home. That first day of school I had no intentions of staying there, and he said 'Roberts, sit your ass down in the front row'. I stayed because he was different. He saw something in me that I didn't see myself, given my whole upbringing. He saw that, and he cared. He lit a fire under my ass to push through."

Sonneborn, now an English teacher at Thornton Academy, said it was an honor to teach alongside Ferg for her first nine years of teaching. "He really knew how to push boundaries, but in a healthy risk-taking way. He modeled that for his students every day," she said.

"When that bell rings, I still channel Ferg every day," she said. "We would push each other. He always reminded me to keep things very academic and help the students to be better writers and thinkers."

A very humble man, said Laurie, he took great pride in his kids. "We didn't have children of our own, so he always thought of THEM ALL as his kids. He loved, loved his kids."

As for his honor, Laurie said he would take great pride in the gesture.

"He was so, so humble. But he would be smiling in his heart if he knew about the classrooms," she said.