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## Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mark Rains honored at retirement party

Dixie County School Board Chairman Tim Alexander (left) presents Superintendent Mark Rains with a parting gift. Dixie County Assistant

Superintendent of Schools (Finance and Business Services) Tonya Howell, acting on behalf of the administrative personnel, brought up a big Yeti cooler at the end of the speeches to present to the outgoing superintendent as a gift from them as well. There were other gifts presented to the outgoing superintendent too.

Story, Photo and Video By Jeff M. Hardison © Nov. 6, 2016 @ 3:37 p.m.

**CROSS CITY** -- A three-hour program with an hour and a half of that being speeches and presentations heralded the start of retirement for Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mark Rains on Thursday (Nov. 3).

After more than 36 years of service to helping public education in Dixie County, the long line-up of speakers might seem like a Reader's Digest condensed book version of the man who is legendary in local circles for being a Christian soul whose love for God and people shines through success after success in his life.



Nicole Chesser stands behind one of the tables that held some of the 300 cupcakes she made. There were many different flavors and every cupcake was delicious. Josey Storey, Tonya Howell, Sharon McCall and many others helped make this event a complete success.

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The range of people from Rains' church family, his own family, his colleagues in the Dixie County School System and even a fellow superintendent of schools that is retiring at the same time does capture the essence of truth reflected in the celebration of a successful professional career now leading into all that comes with retirement.

Levy County Superintendent of Schools Robert O. "Bob" Hastings was among the jokesters during his time at the podium, and he did get the most laughs. Beyond the many extremely funny jokes and zingers -- including Hasting mentioning that the construction of the new Williston Middle High School was ahead of time and under budget -- in contrast with a slightly different standing at the future Dixie County Middle High School, which is under construction.

Retiring Superintendent Hastings and retiring Superintendent Rains, however, will be continuing something they do now. They plan to play golf together on occasion after they retire.



**People spoke from this podium, which had golf clubs put together with flowers. These are clubs that Mark Rains donated to be used as decorations. They are not likely to be able to be taken apart, given the manner in which they were attached to each other.**

Golf was the theme of the extraordinarily smart decorations inside the Dolphus

Peppers Jr. Gymnasium on the campus of Dixie County High School in Cross City.

Josey Storey coordinated the committee of folks who decorated the gym for the event. Another significant participant in making this party a wonderful send-off was Nicole Chesser, who made 300 cupcakes of many different flavors.

The cake and punch was superb as well, as this retirement shindig will go down in Dixie County history as a wonderful celebration of the transition into retirement.

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## **School Board Chairman Tim Alexander prepares to start the program.**

School Board Chairman Tim Alexander opened the speaking session of the event, which followed the first hour of socialization and reminiscing by the scores of guests and visitors, when Alexander welcomed everyone.

Alexander said he agrees with those who have said this phase in a person's life is bittersweet. There is the sweetness of deciding whether to go fishing or hunting, or to play golf or mow the yard, "or spend time with the grandchildren that you talk about so often."

He went on to say that it will be sweet for Mark Rains' wife Gail Rains, because he will have the supper cooked, shopping completed, house cleaned and have everything done as it should be before she gets off work and comes home.

Chairman Alexander shared with the listeners that Superintendent Rains served from 1980 to 1989 as a teacher at Dixie County High School in the subjects of math, physical education and alternative education.

From 1989 to 1993, Rains was assistant principal at DCHS. From 1993 to 2001, he was the principal of Ruth Rains Middle School – which was named for his mother.

From 2001 to 2008 he was the director of support services for the Dixie County School District, and he was elected for two four-year terms so that he served from 2008 until his departure this month as superintendent.

And while that listing of accomplishments is significant, the expressions of love and respect shared by a dozen-plus people that afternoon captured what the man accomplished as well.

Alexander said he remembers the first time he came to Rains with a problem after Rains was elected superintendent, and Alexander was told by Rains "... philosophically speaking," which might be a phrase others heard Rains use as he would start providing an answer.

This phrase, Alexander learned, was a code that led to a point where Rains would pull a rabbit out of a hat.

Alexander looked up what this phrase might refer to and found it was "reasonable,

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wise or learned.” When Rains gave answers, Alexander said, they were reasonable – having been reached after a lot of thought and wisdom were applied.

Another aspect of Rains’ nature that Alexander shared was that the man is calm, especially in the face of danger or disappointment. Rains met danger and disappointment with calm responses, Alexander said.

“Mr. Rains has definitely been a man of great character,” Alexander said. “He is a great leader.”

The strong stance that the superintendent has taken in the face of Christians being challenged in regard to the right to pray, Alexander said, is something for which he should be recognized.

Rains is a strong family man with the values that go with that. He cares about his co-workers, Alexander continued. He cares about all of the students, and about their safety – which is paramount, Alexander said of Rains.

**One of the several tables displaying different aspects of Mark Rains' career is seen. This includes aspects of the Dixie County Middle High School that is under construction.**

## THE REV. MIKE BROWN

The Rev. Mike Brown of First Baptist Church of Cross City gave the invocation, but before that he spoke about Mark Rains being a part of that church – which is right across the street from the current DCHS.

As Rains enters this new aspect of life, retirement, Rev. Brown said he hopes he will embrace it with the same zeal, optimism and confidence that he has embraced the completed seasons and chapters of his life that will be behind him now.

Pastor Brown said Rains has been an inspiration to him as he does the Lord’s work in the church across the street.



**Pastor P.J. Hope is not only a church leader but he is the transportation coordinator for Dixie County Schools. He was among the student athletes who were influenced by Coach Mark Rains.**

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## **P.J. HOPE**

P.J. Hope has his name up among the banners in the gymnasium for outstanding accomplishments in basketball while a student at DCHS.

Hope said he is very appreciative of Rains, who saw something in the student athlete, and put him on a winning team.

Rains was always an encourager, Hope said, as he gave students nuggets for their minds – telling them “good job” and sharing memorable quotes.

“Well,” Hope said as he was reciting Rains, “let me tell ya’ son. Let me tell ya’.”

Hope said he is thankful to God for letting Rains be in his life, as a great mentor. As he looked at the definition of a leader, Hope found that Rains has the attributes – a purpose, a passion, integrity, trust, curiosity and daring.

He said Rains has all of these, and Hope thanked Rains for all that he has done in Hope’s life.

**Chuck Clemons is involved with one of the colleges serving the area. He is currently running to be the member of the Florida House of Representatives for the people in District 21, which includes Dixie County. He is a High Springs native.**



## **CHUCK CLEMONS**

Florida House Dist. 21

Republican candidate Chuck Clemons spoke about his relationship with Rains.

Their friendship started about 42 years ago, Clemons said. They were competitors as children, and later became friends.

Clemons said he saw Rains as a leader on the basketball court and on the football field back when they were both in high school. Clemons spoke about hope, promise and paying it forward.

Growing up in High Springs, Clemons said teachers, principals and coaches meant everything to him.

In his 36 years in education, Clemons said, Rains “never had a bad day. He’s had some hard days.”

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Being surrounded by students filled with hope and promise, Clemons said, made it so that Rains never had a bad day.

Clemons said that he knows Rains has been blessed by God, in part by “marrying way above himself” and the audience laughed.

During the past 36 years, Clemons said, Rains has been paying it forward by using the skills he learned from Coach Dean Chesser and others.

“And he has made an indelible mark,” Clemons said, “on all of those young people.”



**Ken Baumer points to Mark Rains as he speaks about the man who was once a sixth grader.**

## **KEN BAUMER**

The first day Ken Baumer taught in Dixie County was in August of 1969, he said.

That first class included a 10-year-old sixth grader named Mark Rains. He had Rains again as a student in 11th grade, Baumer said.

In between that time, Baumer was also neighbors with the Rains’ family, who lived across the street from him. In 1980, when Rains was hired as a teacher, Baumer was the principal – therefore, he was his first principal too.

Baumer said he appreciates Rains’ skill as a coach, too, because he helped make title-winning teams, which can reflect well on a principal.

Baumer said he appreciates the friendship they have had for the past 47 years.

During the past six years since he retired, Baumer learned some things and he shared this sage advice. He said Rains should remember that he is retiring – not expiring.

“Retirement means goodbye to tension,” Baumer said, “hello to pension. Retirement is like a six-month vacation, twice a year.”

He advised his friend to do what he wants, and to make himself happy. Baumer shared a number of other positive ideas about retirement.

Baumer said he thought about the good things related to being old. He couldn’t come up with any. He found a book on the subject, and he invited Rains to come read from that book to the audience.



**Mark Rains shows the audience that the book of positive aspects from being old -- is just blank pages.**

Rains went to the front of the room. He shared with the people that all of the pages were blank. This was another part of the program that was seasoned with humor,

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as well as reflecting on the life of the man who was retiring.

Baumer shared an Irish saying, “Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened.” (Dr. Seuss)



**There were a number of displays that included certificates and awards, and even photo albums. Earlier in the afternoon there was a video-audio presentation of slides showing several photos from Mark Rains' life so far.**

## **FAITH HILL**

Faith Hill quoted Frank McKinney Hubbard, an American cartoonist, humorist, and journalist better known by his pen name "Kin" Hubbard.

Hubbard is noted as having said “When some fellas decide to retire, nobody knows the difference.”

Hill said this is exactly opposite from what is happening now as Rains joins the ranks of retirees.

Superintendent Rains always strived to find what is good, and what is right, Hill said. In her 39 years of teaching and as a guidance counselor, Hill would seldom visit the district office, she said.

When she relocated to the district office as the ESE director, Hill remembers noticing the open Bible on Rains' desk. That set the tone from that point on for her, she said, in her discourse with him.

When there were problems, she said, Rains would often let the directors know that he would have to think about it and to pray about it.

When a swift decision was required, she knew his response would be that he would always do what was right. Meeting the needs of exceptional students, she said, often meant more money, more effort and other resources would be required.

She knew that she could count on him, because he would always say that it is what is right for that student. And this superintendent said what he meant and did what he said he would do.

Hill said Rains may not have known how grateful she was for his actions, because

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although she often told him about how much it meant to her to have that support from the top school district administrator "... he would just nod and smile."

"I always appreciated his calm, steadfast countenance in our office," Hill said. "He does have a poker face, and even during the most difficult, unexpected circumstances arising during the course of a school day, as it does have to happen, he was able to convey, and most importantly communicate the utmost sense of calm."

She publicly congratulated him on his retirement and mentioned that she hopes he enjoys the happy memories of the years he has spent contributing to the success of students, faculty and other administrators in Dixie County.

## **GARRY DURHAM**

Garry Durham said he played basketball and football with Rains in Rains' parents' backyard when they were in the seventh grade.

They shared classes together through the years, and nowadays they are in the same Sunday school class.

From 1981, Durham also worked with Rains as a colleague when Rains was a teacher, then assistant principal and principal, director of support services and as superintendent of schools.

Durham said that he, Rains and Bruce Boyette were told to run the baseball program at DCHS one year. Durham told stories about Boyette's driving skills and that he had asked those two to get lime to place lines on the baseball field.

When Boyette and Rains returned, Durham said he noticed Rains had let Boyette drive Durham's VW. While he did not consider that choice to let Boyette drive his VW to be a good reflection of Rains' decision-making skill, Durham later came to implicitly trust Rains' decision-making skill.

Durham said "You can't be much of a leader if you turn around and see nobody is following."

He told Rains that if he turned around, he would see many people following his leadership during his life and that even in retirement; Rains will be able to turn around and see people behind him.

He sees Rains as a good Christian friend, as well as a former colleague.

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## **SHELBI McCALL**

Shelbi McCall, a very accomplished DCHS graduate, must have been the youngest speaker of the day.

McCall was crowned as National Miss United States Agriculture on June 27, 2015, in Dothan, Ala. She graduated from DCHS as Valedictorian and has become a kindergarten teacher as a graduate of Santa Fe College. She traveled extensively promoting the agriculture industry during 2015.

She is the daughter of Sharon McCall and the late Carson McCall.

During her speech, the young Ms. McCall said she has known Rains all of her life. She reminded people that his work has had an influence on the lives of thousands of students over the years.

Rains has exemplified servant leadership while helping the people of Dixie County, she said.

With his ability to demonstrate grace, peace and joy, Rains helped countless students, including those who some may label as a troublemaker, McCall said.

She said everyone has come to express their sincere gratitude for his undeniable love of education. He has instilled the kindness, patience and God's love into the lives of future generations, McCall said. Rains has helped everyone to find the learning environment in Dixie County to be enjoyable, she said.

She prays that the knowledge and skills that generations of Dixie County students have gained thanks to the work of Rains, goes to further help the people around them.

## **BOB HASTINGS**

Levy County Superintendent of Schools Robert O. "Bob" Hastings told a few very good jokes and poked fun a bit as he mentioned that the Dixie County Middle High School that is under construction is behind its anticipated finish date.

Before Hastings started joking about Rains, he mentioned that his friend and colleague enjoyed a chance to "roast" Hastings during a recent fundraiser for education in Levy County.

"Mark is loving," Hastings said as he began listing traits that he sees in his fellow retiring superintendent of schools. "He is kind. He's a good husband. He's a good father,

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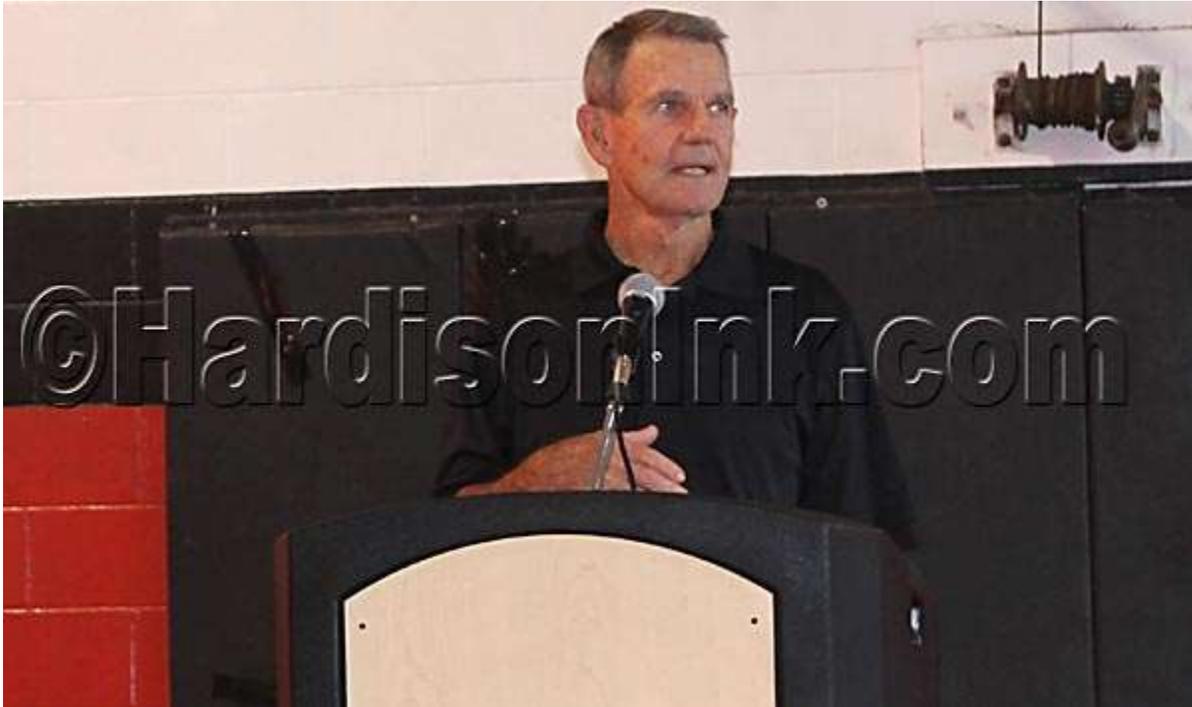
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and a good grandfather.

“Mr. Rains is considerate,” Hastings continued. “He is compassionate. He is forgiving. But he is also intelligent. He is gifted. Some consider him an intellectual giant. He is hardworking. He is dedicated. He’s loyal, steadfast. He is an over-achiever. And most of all, he is a successful superintendent.”

Hastings said Rains should be applauded for moving the Dixie County Public School System academically to become one of the top school districts in the state of Florida.

“Mark,” Hastings said, “that’s all the things you had written down for me to say.” And as they did several times during Hastings’ speech, the crowd laughed.



## **DEAN CHESSER**

Dean Chesser joked that he had the same list from Rains, but he was not going to read that to the audience.

Education and coaching, Chesser said, is about people and relationships that are built up over the years.

Chesser said he was among Rains’ coaches. As he looked out over the audience, Coach Chesser said he saw people who he coached who became county commissioners, School Board members, coaches, lawyers and were in other vocations.

Some people may say that coaches make players, Chesser said, but the things coaches learn from players are what make them better coaches.

Chesser said any person can look back and see defining moments in their lives.

He recounted some of those moments from his life in relationship with Rains.

Forty-three years ago, Chesser said, he came to Dixie County as a football coach.

Coach Chesser said one of the things that impressed him about Rains as an athlete was that he would give it all he had.

Back 43 years ago, Chesser said, Lake Butler High School was Dixie County High School’s nemesis in football. Many key players had been injured in the game with LBHS

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that season.

So the coaches chose to bring JV quarterback Rains in as the starting quarterback for the game against Crescent City, a team that was 5-0 for the season at that point.

The coach wondered if this moment would be too big for Rains.

“Will he take a snap” the coach said. “Or will he choke? We didn’t know.”

Coaches who put players in those types of situations think “Man, I hope I made the right choice,” Chesser said.

Rains played a great game. The DCHS team won 52-22, Chesser said.

The next week, Chesser said, Dixie County faced the undefeated Chiefland team that was 6-0.

“We played them for homecoming,” Chesser said, “and we beat them.”

Those are moments that Rains gave Chesser that he will always remember, the coach said.

Chesser said he has seen people succeed in various aspects of their lives.

“But I have never seen a person who is successful in everything they try to do,” Chesser said. “Isn’t that sickening?”

The audience laughed at that as Chesser said he has seen Rains succeed as a basketball player and a football player, as a teacher, as a basketball coach, as an assistant principal, as a principal, as a superintendent, as a husband, father and grandfather.

People can’t be successful just by wanting it, Chesser continued. They have to plan for it, and Rains has always planned for it.

Coach Chesser said a godly man will be like a tree planted next to a river, where he made reference to Psalm 1:3, which says “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

“I love you son,” Chesser said. “God bless you.”

## **GWEN CARMICHAEL**

In 1968, Gwen Carmichael had Rains as an almost 10-year-old student, and that is when she first met him. Carmichael has known him ever since then.

She watched him grown up and become a teacher and a coach. When he was coaching boys’ basketball, she was coaching girls’ basketball in the same gymnasium where the retirement party was held.

She said all of the previous speakers captured the essence of the man who displayed companionship for his colleagues and compassion for children.

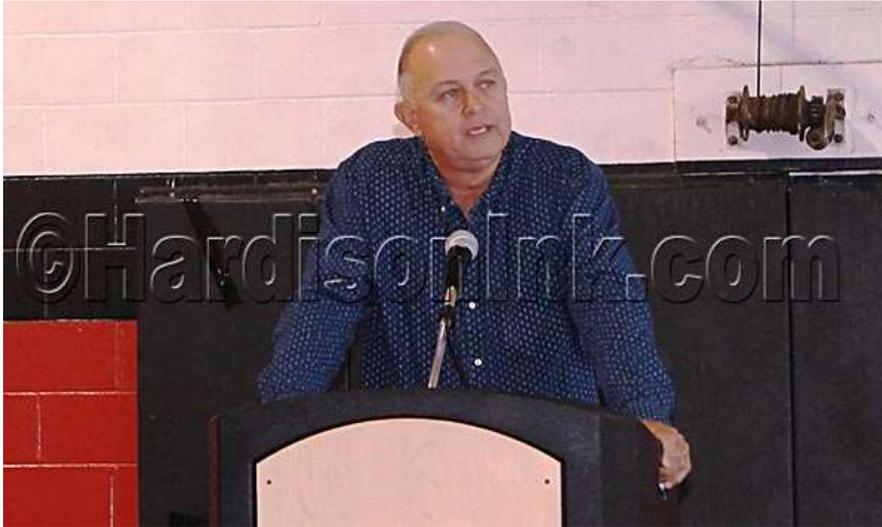
Carmichael told a story about a student who needed major dental work, but whose family could not afford it. Rains contacted the University of Florida, College of

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Dentistry, and either Rains or another person would take the student there every week for several weeks to have the work completed.

## GLENN O'STEEN

Glenn O'Steen has known Rains all of their lives – 58 years, he said.



Rains was born Sept. 19, 1958. O'Steen was born Sept. 16, 1958.

"I can't remember life without Mark Rains," O'Steen said.

O'Steen said he found Rains to be a good friend, who would always give good, sound advice based on the honest, straightforward truth.

O'Steen spoke about growing up as a child with Rains and

eventually going to high school where they played on the same team under Coach Chesser and the other coaches.

Thinking back, O'Steen said, he looked at the various plaques in sports won with Coach Rains and Coach Chesser.

"You know," O'Steen said, "Coach Chesser didn't have quite the athletes that Mark did."

Back when O'Steen and Rains played football against Chiefland, there was a safety named Bennett, O'Steen said. And that Chiefland player was a safety.

O'Steen said he remembers the "Y-27-Slant" play because with Rains as quarterback and O'Steen as the receiver, that was the play that was called.

O'Steen had to jump to catch the football and Bennett hit him in the stomach, knocking the breath out of the receiver from Dixie County. Going back to the next huddle, Rains said to O'Steen "That was a good catch."

"I said," O'Steen said, "Don't you ever call 'Y-27-Slant' again."

O'Steen said Rains always was upbeat, happy and focused on what was to be done.

O'Steen wrapped up his speech about Rains, after telling a few stories.

"You know," O'Steen said, "God puts people in our paths -- each and every one of us."

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And it's up to us to grab ahold of that person that God gives us an opportunity to be around. And I'll tell you what: I thank God that I had the sense to grab ahold of him, because he's been a good friend."

## **MARINDA NORTON and ANDREW RAINS**

Marinda Norton and Andrew Rains are the children of Mark and Gail Rains.



They spoke about their father.

Norton said her father has been called "courageous," "a hero," "Christian" and "a leader."

She watched her father make difficult decisions that did require courage. He always tried to do the right thing for students, even at the cost of friendships, she said.

Norton saw her father as a hero to students when they needed someone to believe in them; someone

to protect them; and someone to correct them with loving discipline, she said.

He has been an inspiration to her, she said.

"Most importantly," Norton continued, "he has led his home and his career with Christian integrity.

"Dad," she continued as she addressed Superintendent Rains, "thank you for your amazing service to our community over the last 36 years. And most importantly, thank you for leaving such an inspiring legacy. Thank you."

Andrew Rains spoke after his sister.

The younger Mr. Rains said he inherited the genetics from his father that included his blazing speed as a runner. The man said that as a teen he would criticize his father for that.

"I'd get mad and yell at him," Rains said, "and he would just laugh. And after all this, the only good thing he had going for him was he had a good head of hair.

"He didn't even give me that," Rains continued to jokingly say of his father.

Rains said that he understands now that his father "spoiled him" by giving so much of

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his time to be with his son. Rains said his 3-year-old boy has shown him that children want that time with their parents.

After a full day of work and coaching basketball, his father would spend time with him in that very gym where the program was held Thursday.

“Thank you,” he said to his father who spent time shooting baskets with his young son. “I love you. It really has made me who I am.”

Rains liked to use quotes, his son said.

He chose some quotes.

Henry L. Doherty said “Plenty of men can do good work for a spurt and with immediate promotion in mind, but for promotion you want a man in whom good work has become a habit.”

Rains said his father did not come in like a bottle rocket and that was it. He came in and did good work over and over again for 36 years.

Dick Van Arsdale said “I’m a firm believer in quiet confidence. By that I mean knowing inwardly that you are good, and not exhibiting a boastful attitude outwardly. If an athlete doesn’t believe in himself, no one else will.”

Rains said that during his father’s 36-year career as a professional educator and administrator, his father gained that quiet confidence.

Sam Huff said “Discipline is the whole key to being successful. We all get 24 hours each day. That’s the only fair thing; it’s the only thing that’s equal. What we do with those 24 hours is up to us.”

Rains said his father is disciplined. When he retires, he will do things. And one of those things might be to be doing nothing. But if his father is doing nothing, it is because he has planned to do just that, his son said.

Rains said that his father was successful in his profession and he said his father will be successful in retirement.