

Stowers' SCHOOL

The Hillsborough County School Board pays tribute to local businessman and philanthropist Dick Stowers

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Dick Stowers was a country boy from Brandon, back when Brandon was little more than cow pastures and orange fields. At 16, he moved to downtown Tampa, where he was rezoned from Brandon High School to Hillsborough. He wasn't ready for the transition.

"Hillsborough was too big, it scared me to death," says Stowers. "That thing intimidated me so bad. I wouldn't even go in."

So for two years Dick caught the 7am Tamiami Trail Bus from Union Station, got dropped off on S.R. 60 and walked the rest of the way to attend Brandon High School with his friends. There were 83 people in his graduating class. *(Cont. on next page)*

Dick Stowers and his wife Raymetta. ►



This past spring, 435 students graduated from Brandon High School. And over the years, many other schools have sprouted up around eastern Hillsborough to accommodate the explosion of population. The newest holds special meaning to Dick Stowers. It's called Stowers Elementary.

"There used to be nothing but beautiful woods out there (where Stowers Elementary is)," says Dick. "There was a lake where a lot of the kids did their smooching. It was good, clean water to swim in, and boys would race their

cars around it. Those were good days." A lot has changed since then. Behind his glasses, Dick's eyes survey the brand new school bearing his name. "The change—and the school—is phenomenal," he says. "I still can't believe this happened."

Dick is honored and humbled. He says he would have never thought in a million years that people would want to name a

school after him. More than 1,000 people signed a petition to make it happen, and more than 100 wrote personal letters. The idea

came from Dick's wife,

▲ More than 100 letters were written in support of the school's naming.

“I want to be around, I want to teach them how to daydream.”

— Dick Stowers

Dick Stowers' senior picture. ►

Raymetta. She says she has always tried to think of something that would be special enough to celebrate all that Dick has done for her and for Brandon. "He's always been very involved with the schools," says Raymetta.

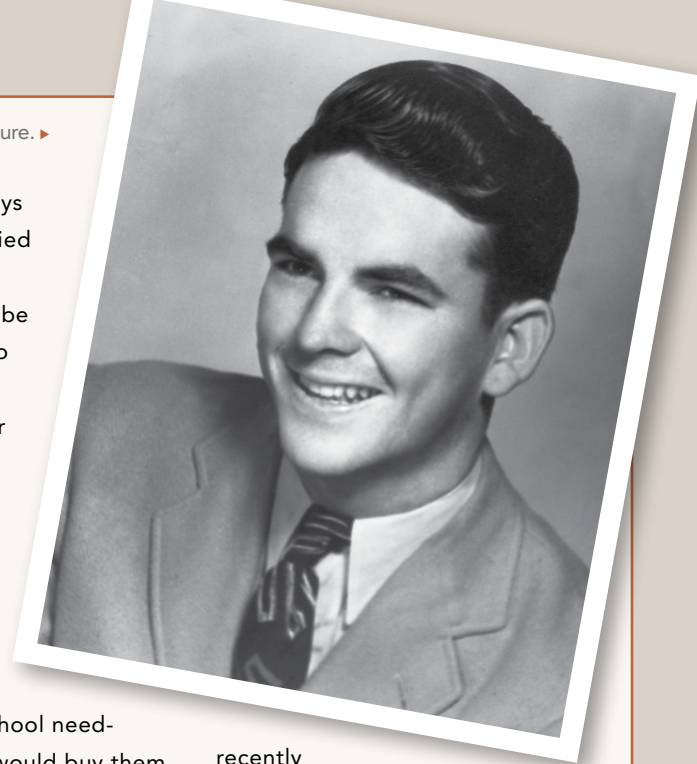
"If the band at Brandon High School needed uniforms, he would buy them uniforms. If they needed to go on a trip to the state championship and didn't have the money, he'd give them the money. He did a lot of that."

Raymetta's son Kevin Talbert chimes in, "He's done tons for the community that no one even knows about. He never wants recognition from anyone. He'll go to church and find out they need a piano, and he'll buy them a piano with no mention of it at all."

Dick and Raymetta met 26 years ago at the Stowers Funeral Home Dick built in 1960. She had

recently lost her husband and used the funeral home as a meeting place to get a hospice started in Brandon. Stowers was home to many organizations before the Brandon boom, including Bell Shoals Baptist Church. "It's amazing how you got involved back in those days to help people get things going," says Dick.

Over the years, Dick was involved with the Brandon Kiwanis Club, Brandon Elks Club and Boys and Girls Club of Brandon. He was once president of the Brandon Chamber of Commerce and was even named honorary mayor.



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▲ A glimpse of the new Stowers Elementary School.

"I had more fun that year than a barrel of monkeys," he says.

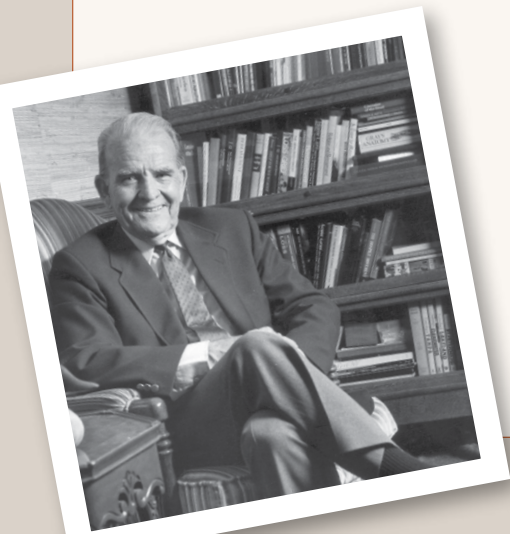
But all work and no play made Dick a dull boy. Until he met Raymetta. "I worked all my life, from the time I was 16," says Stowers. "I never developed hobbies. Raymetta taught me how to live—how to separate work and life. She taught me about family. The first time around (first marriage) I didn't do so good.

I feel really bad about that sometimes."

Nowadays you can find Dick tending to his garden or visiting one of his five grandchildren. And when his school opens this August, he plans on visiting those kids, too.

"I want to be around, I want to teach them how to daydream," Stowers says. "When I was little, I daydreamed about a funeral home in Brandon and it came true. Whether these kids want to make great Cuban sandwiches, own a bowling alley or be a car salesman, they need to learn to do what makes them happy—to go out there and find their niche—to make a difference in their community." ■

◀ This picture of Dick at Stowers Funeral Home was taken about 15 years ago.



school STATS

SCHOOL MOTTO:

"Expect success"

PRINCIPAL:

Catherine Lennard-Shields. "We want to live up to a school that will make Mr. Stowers and the community proud," she says.

ON CAMPUS:

The school shares a campus with Glenn Barrington Middle School. Principal Lennard-Shields thinks it's a great opportunity for her students to develop relationships with the middle school, decreasing the apprehension that both parents and kids have during the tough transition after fifth grade.

ZONING:

Students from FishHawk and Boyette Springs will be zoned for the new school.

CAPACITY:

The school is at 45 percent capacity in its first year, but officials anticipate quick growth. A new neighborhood behind the school is currently under development.

► "We are very excited," says Catherine, standing in front of the school's construction site. "And working so closely with Mr. Stowers makes it even more exciting. We want him to be very involved with our school."

