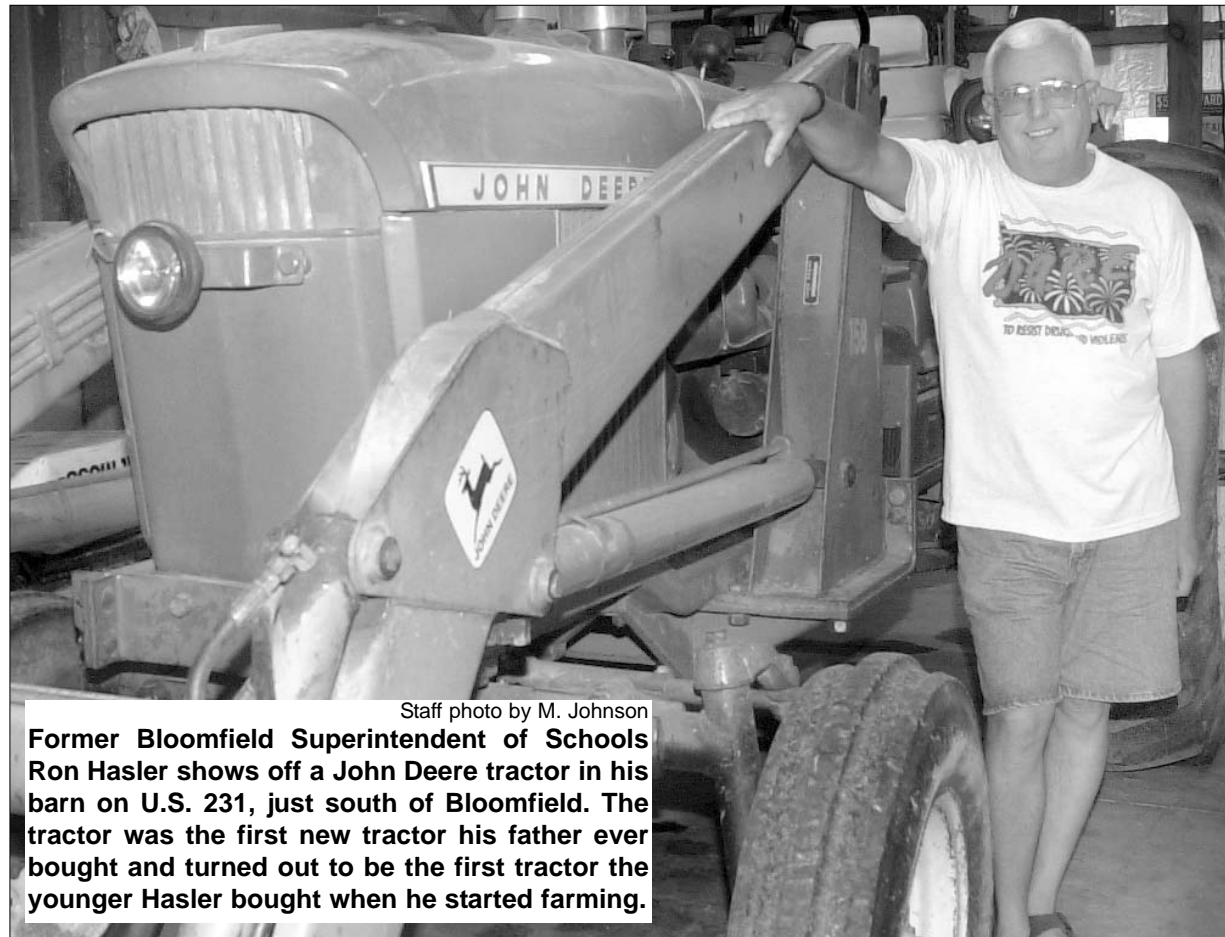


*When you think  
you've got it all  
figured out ...*

# Life

# Happens

*(... Just ask Ron Hasler)*



Staff photo by M. Johnson  
Former Bloomfield Superintendent of Schools Ron Hasler shows off a John Deere tractor in his barn on U.S. 231, just south of Bloomfield. The tractor was the first new tractor his father ever bought and turned out to be the first tractor the younger Hasler bought when he started farming.

**By Michael Johnson**  
Free Press Editor

**S**ometimes, no matter how hard one plans, plots and schemes, life has a tendency of interfering - just ask Ron Hasler.

The 60-year-old former superintendent of schools for Bloomfield officially retired about a week ago - after being an agriculture teacher, a farmer, an elementary school principal, and finally, a superintendent.

Although Ron is content, happy and busy during the early days of his retirement, he's not quite sure how he got where he is - it's not what he originally planned.

The only child of Margaret and the late David Hasler originally just wanted to be a farmer - helping his dad out on their family farm in the Newberry area.

Instead, after graduating from Switz City Central High School in 1964, a young, skinny and smiling Ron went off to Purdue to major in Agriculture Education - fulfilling a dream of his father.

"I never wanted to teach," Ron says from his home on U.S. 231 South, just south of Bloomfield on Independence Day. "Dad wanted to teach. I wanted to come home and farm."

He says he went ahead and headed to Purdue for an Ag/Ed degree because had he come home to farm, the added knowledge would serve him well.

"But I didn't want to teach," he smiles.

Ever the school-boy, Ron says his early college career almost derailed after the first semester. The assistant dean of the School of

Agriculture brought the teen into his office - after making him wait for several hours.

"Dean Phendler said he wanted to see me at 2 o'clock, so I was there at a quarter-til," says Ron with his trademark grin. "Exactly at 2 o'clock, his door opened and I popped up. He told me he wasn't ready for me yet and he would tell me when he was ready."

This happened several more times over the next couple of hours, until Ron finally got the hint that jumping up in anticipation simply wasn't going to work - the Dean was making a point about who was in charge of the situation.

"So the next time he came out, I didn't move and he told me to come in," he says. "Then

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# A young Hasler enters the 'Space Program'

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he asked me if I was in the space program."

The befuddled boy asked for clarification - unknowingly playing right into the administrator's hand.

"He said that I must be in the space program because all I was doing in college was taking up space," he chuckles, leaning back in his chair on his last official day at Bloomfield School. Dean Phendler then informed him that if he wanted to continue with his education, he would best be served by a more studious attitude.

The man then kicked him out of his office.

The now-angry and hurt youngster set about proving his nemesis wrong and the next semester he made the President's List - a step above the Dean's List - with straight A's.

"They had this luncheon - my parents were there - it was a big deal," Ron smiles. "And who do we end up sitting right across from but Dean Phendler."

Seeing his opening and showing a little teenage bravado, Ron says he decided to get in the last word and gloat about his presence at the exclusive banquet.

The air was knocked out of his plans for revenge when the dean informed him that it was his experience that in dealing with "farm boys" the most successful method of motivation was simply to make them angry enough so they would either do whatever was necessary to prove their antagonist wrong, or they would go home.

"He got me again," Ron says, now in a full laugh. "My dad leaned over and told me he got the same speech from Dean Phendler several years ago, but he went home."

That incident set him up for success throughout college and an eventual degree from Purdue in Agriculture Education and a teaching certificate in 1968.

Again the plan was to return to Newberry and the farm.

But, along with his father's influence on his decision to enter education, Ron says another influence helped him decide to go into teaching - the Vietnam War.

"My lottery number (for the draft) was not good," he says. "And teachers had an exemption



**FATHER AND SON** - A young Ron Hasler, left, lights a cigar for his father, David, at a special Father-and-Son event at Purdue University in 1964.

from the draft."

So into the classroom Ron went. The year was 1968 and a school in New Albany, Ind., was in need of a Vocational/Agricultural teacher. So, off he went to Floyd Central, and his first real teaching gig.

He was in the classroom of a big, new school and all was right with the world, and going according to the now revised plan.

Then, in 1970, his father suffered his second heart attack - at the age of 47. It was time for Ron to return to Newberry and get behind the wheel of one of his dad's tractors.

But, being a pragmatist and knowing the draft was still in full force; Ron tried for a job in the Bloomfield district. That hope was dashed when an anticipated teacher's retirement didn't happen.

So, plans changed again - he was back to the original goal of being a full-time farmer. He

went into business with his father and pretty soon, Hasler Farm was sowing some 1,400 acres in row crops and raising various types of livestock.

During the same time, the unthinkable happened. At age 48, in July of 1971, David Hasler passed away while camping in the Lafayette area. The middle-age man's heart simply gave out.

"At 25, I not only lost my dad, but I lost my business partner," Ron says, looking at the floor, giving the family dog - Billy - a gentle pat on the head.

Ron's mother and father had built a small campgrounds and lake in Newberry and were returning with a new display-model camper when the elder Hasler's fatal heart attack struck.

"You don't ever get over it," he says. "And you get to the point where you don't want to get

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# 'I just wanted to come home and farm'



**Purdue Freshman Ron Hasler with Mom and Dad in West Lafayette.**

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to get over it."

During that time, Ron was also enlisted in the Bedford unit of the National Guard and was nearing the end of Officer Candidate School. He knew his chances of being drafted were good and if that eventuality came about, he wanted to go into the active military with some rank.

He was somewhat resolved to that fact - and another change of plans - when his father passed away.

Ron went to the commanding colonel's office and basically told him he needed to quit.

"There were other guys in the room and they about laughed me out," he said. "They said 'This isn't a job. You can't quit,'" Ron says. "Then the colonel cleared the room. I didn't know if he was going to yell or beat me or what."

Once alone, he says the caring colonel told him he would ship him back to his unit in Bedford and would dismiss one of his top officer candidate students. "He said I would be home by Thanksgiving. I was home in a month," says Ron.

When his new draft card arrived, Ron was officially listed as having served his necessary tour of duty - so back to farming it was. And, back on track with the original plan ... again.

The early years after his father's death were anything but easy for the then-25-year-old.

For starters, when Ron's dad died, they had a farm full of pigs which were ready for market. The death meant all the business assets were frozen until they could be properly probated.

"At that point, all you can do is keep feeding them," he says. "And when you go to market, they are all overweight."

Plus, his dad had been keeping most of the books for the farms and held a lot of the details of farm operations in his own head.

But, for the next couple of decades, Ron and his family farmed acreage throughout Greene County - finally deciding to downsize in 1990.

After the downsizing, Ron decided to return to the classroom - although that would mean more educational requirements.

But, this time, it was not Ag/Ed - taking a sharp left turn, Ron decided to go to the elementary side of education.

He says that he spent his early teaching career asking his wife - and probably starting more than one domestic squabble - what she was teaching her students in elementary school.

"I was getting kids in the Vocational Education program who could barely read," he says. "So I decided to help them get a start."

Farmer to farm teacher to farmer to grade school teacher, the road was again winding for the man who says he absolutely, positively had no desire, whatsoever, to become an administrator.

After receiving his master's degree and a special certification in reading, Ron set off to change little lives.

His new school in Monroe County was considered a "teacher training ground," averaging a two-thirds faculty turn-over rate every year.

"That wasn't fair to the kids," says Ron. "We all (the faculty) decided we were going to hang in there and we did."

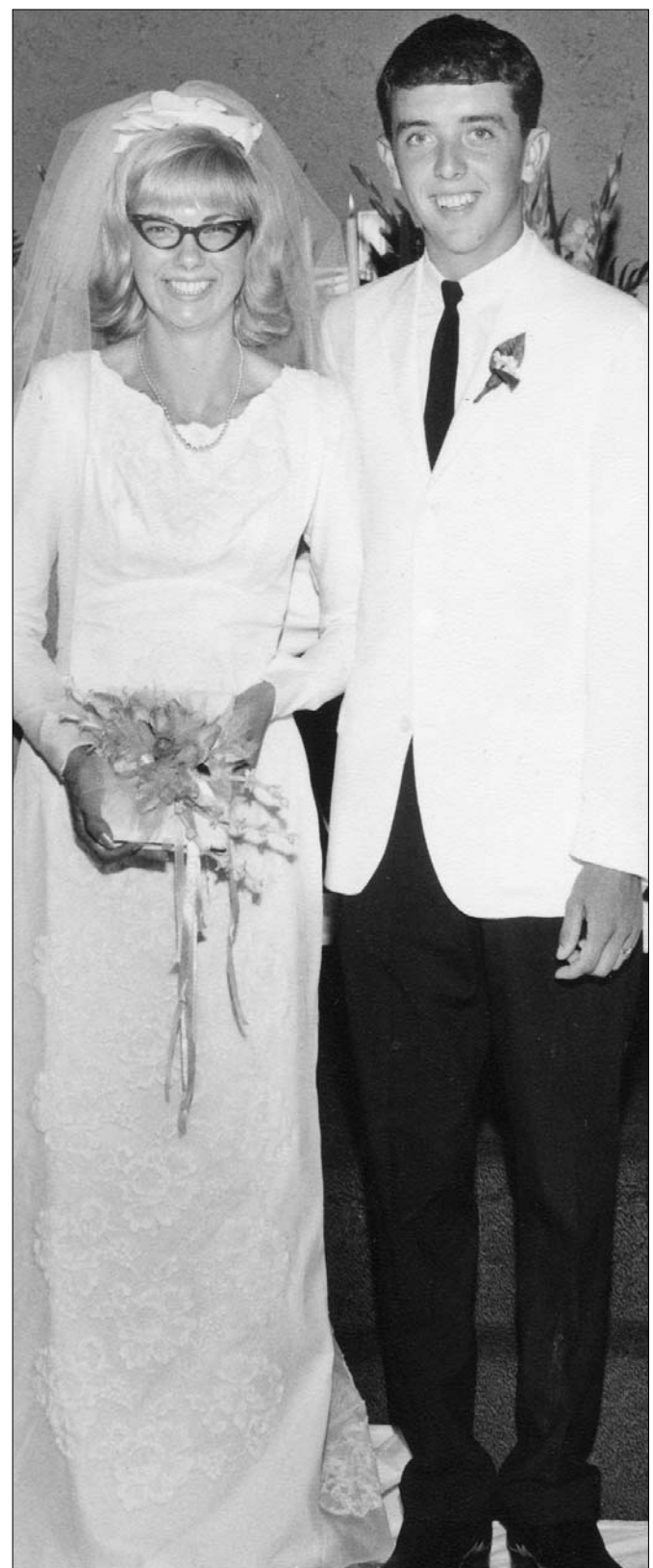
During this adventure in teaching, Ron says that with the exception of math books, the faculty rid themselves of all the old textbooks, opting for teacher-generated curriculum, inclusion of special-education students into the regular classrooms and better use of technology.

It was during this time of experimentation and success that Ron was approached by his bosses who advised him he really needed an administrator's license.

He went to the first couple of classes and decided that this time his almost original plan was best left alone - and he returned to the classroom, not wanting anything to do with running the place.

A short time later, he was again approached - this time by a well-respected administrator - who gently twisted his arm into receiving his

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**Diane and Ron Hasler on their wedding day in 1966.**

# From teacher to farmer to teacher, etc...



At one time, Ron Hasler carried both a teacher's license, administrator's license, Superintendent's license and a CDL truck-driver's license.

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administrator's license.

And, with that gentle nudge - as with most of his career decisions - he was on his eventual way back home again.

In 1999, the elementary principal's job in Bloomfield opened up. So, he decided to go for the job, not knowing that while interviewing for the top elementary spot, he was also being groomed to be Bloomfield's next superintendent.

He says that during his interview, he was asked what set him apart from the other candidates. His only real answer was that he was only nine hours away from having his superintendent's certificate - and that could be an asset for any school district - in case the district was ever in need of an interim chief executive.

"I was hired with the understanding that I complete those nine hours and get my license," he says - still not really realizing at the time the school board was actually hiring its next superintendent.

About a year after garnering the necessary credentials, Ron was promoted to assistant superintendent and finally superintendent the next year.

That was 2001, and his assistant principal,

Mary Jane Vandeventer was promoted to elementary principal at the same time.

So, again, the kid from Newberry who just wanted to plant corn "knuckle deep" was in charge of one of the area's largest employers with a multi-million dollar annual budget.

Although he says he enjoyed his tenure as superintendent, Ron does chuckle when noting that in his life he lost his father, business partner and best friend at age 25, sued a big-business company in federal court and faced a flood that destroyed 800 acres - without crop insurance, it wasn't until two weeks after he became superintendent that he began taking blood pressure medicine. A big laugh ensues when he jokingly bemoans the stress and strain of being a superintendent.

On a more serious note, he says the worst part of the superintendent's job is saying "no" to people more than he would have liked to.

"That's part of it, you have to say 'no' a lot," he says, noting that his experience as superintendent was a very enjoyable period despite the stress of union contract negotiations, disgruntled parents and public funding worries.

Again, he considers all of that a simple bend or two in the road.

But even while planning retirement, Ron still can't seem to stay the course.

"I wanted to go to [a local implement dealer] and maybe sell tractors part-time," he says. "And go someplace warm during the winter."

Then the call came from Educational Services - a school consulting firm - with a deal too good to turn down. So the road curved yet again.

After spending a little time helping Bloomfield's new superintendent get in the saddle, Ron will become a school consultant. But he will still get his winters off to go south.

"All I wanted to do was farm," he smiles, again. Diane, his wife of 40 years, just kind of grins. It's a contented grin that somehow says - "Who knows what tomorrow will bring."

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