

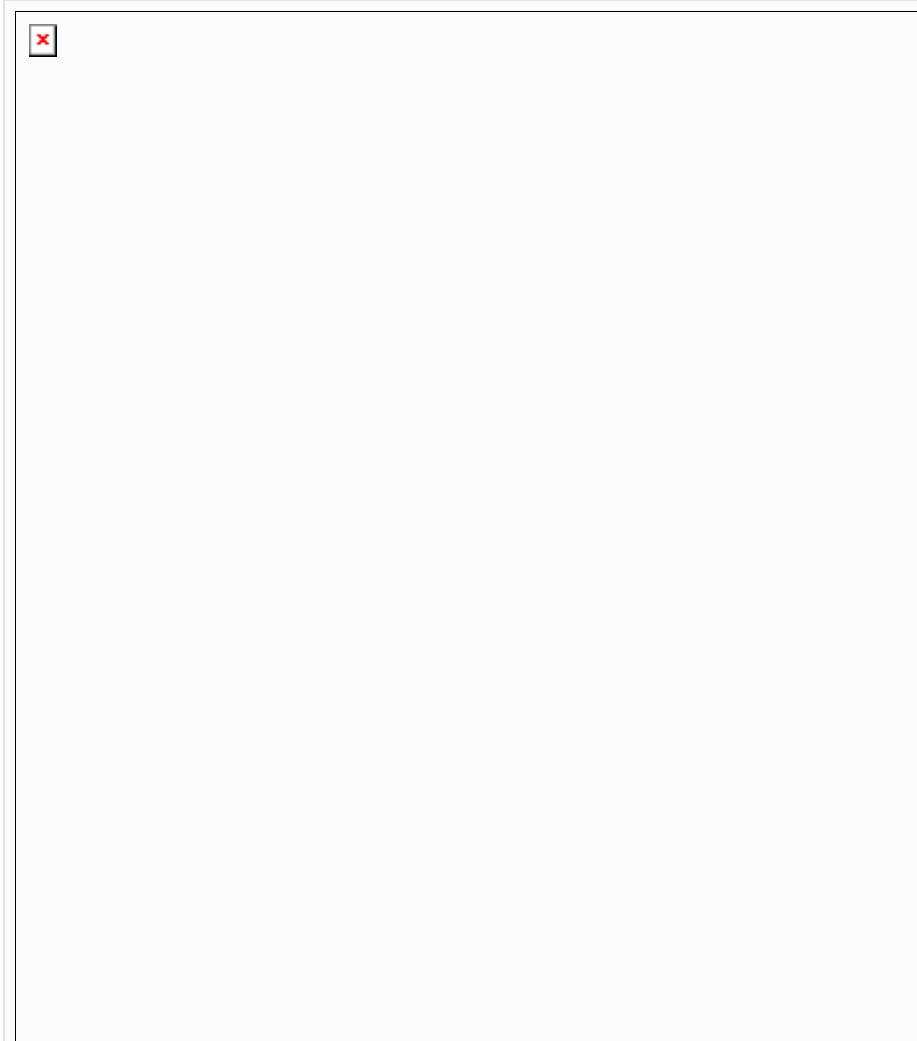


Everything Michigan

Students at Jackson school get visit from man who designed the 50-star U.S. flag

By Mike D. Lammi

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Dave Weatherwax | Jackson Citizen Patriot

Bob Heft joins the students of Paragon Charter Academy in saying the Pledge of Allegiance on Thursday.

Bob Heft was 17 years old when he spent one weekend in 1958 designing a new 50-star American flag for a high school history project — before there were enough states for all the stars.

His classmates called him "Betsy Ross," and the final product earned him a B-minus. His teacher told him he would change the grade if Heft got the flag accepted in Washington, Heft told students Thursday at Paragon Academy as part of Constitution Day.

Heft, 67, did send the flag to the capital through his congressman, and in 1960, while working his first job as a draftsman, he received a phone call from President Eisenhower about his design becoming the next symbol of the United States.

Since then, Heft has met nine presidents, visited 57 countries and flew on Air Force One with President Kennedy.

"Is what you do in school important?" he asked students while wearing an American flag-style shirt. "You better believe it's important.

"What I did at your age has forever kept me busy."

Heft, who grew up in Lancaster, Ohio, and lives in Saginaw, showed students variations of the American flag and explained their history.

"I did not know that the flag was that recently created," said eighth-grader Trisha Guild, 13.

Trisha said her sister, brother and father were all in the military. She said she was happy to hear Heft's emphasis on the flag as a symbol of the country, rather than just a piece of cloth.

Heft, a teacher for more than 32 years, said he was a shy kid and always tries to reach out to those students in the audience who might be lacking confidence.

"If you have a dream, you've got to take steps to make it a reality," he said.

There have been 27 changes to Old Glory. Heft says he is proud to have created the one that has lasted since Hawaii and Alaska were welcomed into the union 50 years ago.

"He never gave up," eighth-grader Grecia Quiroga, 13, said of Heft's actions after his teacher's challenge. "So that's something to learn."

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