



*Distinguished Educator - 2025*

**Dave Podlogar**

**1970-2003**

They Lit the Way



DISTINGUISHED  
EDUCATOR

I was born and raised on the Iron Range, Chisholm and then we moved to Babbitt for my Junior & Senior years. Being a smaller school system, I became more involved with school and we were able to establish more social activities like a student teen center. As a senior, I was elected Senior class president and we were able to get the school board to change the name from Babbitt High School to John F Kennedy High School in Babbitt. Inspired by the teachers there and working in the taconite mine during the summers, I continued my education at Bemidji State College.

There, I majored in Construction and Industrial Management, though the professor of the drafting department recommended I pursue a teaching degree, which I did. Fortunately, I was able to student teach at Bemidji High School and enjoyed that experience, so I decided on teaching as my career choice. With a double major, I was able to earn a teaching graduate assistantship and earned a masters degree.

Albert Lea being such a beautiful community with the lakes and parks reminded me of northern Minnesota. Southwest JH was a newer school with great shop rooms and Industrial Arts programs, it became my choice in 1970. The staff there was incredible, helpful and they made it feel like a big family. As I set up my programs, I tried to inspire the students to consider the trades as a vocation or hobby, while building interest and fun in the various classes. Safety was the most important concern, not to be afraid of the tools and machines, but to respect and use them correctly. The Albert Lea sports teams were top notch and I was proud to be a junior high basketball coach. This along with opening the shops before and after school enabled me to work with kids at a different level. Though openings at the high school came about, I spent my entire career at Southwest and enjoyed the years spent there until I retired in 2023. Satisfaction also came when past students would tell me of their enjoyment of the I. A. classes which became current hobbies or their vocation. I earned a real estate license and many former students called me to buy their first home or an upgrade, which made me feel good in their trust.

The Knights of Columbus was a big part of my life, as we were able to provide funds and scholarships to students, along with help in the church and community. Camping was some of our family fun time, Mary and I along with our daughters Julia and Melissa spent many weekends and vacations around the area and up north enjoying the outdoors. School along with school events kept us busy and provided the girls a strong foundation for their futures. I'm very proud of my family, Julia and husband Steve Thompson, also an Albert Lea grad, along with children Griffin and Malana who also attended A L schools and are doing well. Melissa and husband Todd Laberee live in Minnetonka and their children, Isabella, Anika, Katarina, who graduated from school there and likewise are all doing well.

I was fortunate to meet and marry Myrna Ostermann, a retired Faribault elementary school teacher. My family grew from 9 to 23 and continues to grow. The Faribault families also valued education and are also doing well, which is a blessing for both of us. We live in Faribault during the Summer and Surprise Az during the winter, along with traveling when the destination suits us