

DR. TOM SYNNOTT – A LIFE REMEMBERED

Recently, a great man died. Some of you knew him, others knew of him, and some may not have known about him at all. But everyone involved with the Options School should remember and honor Dr. Tom Synnott, our founder and leader. Dr. Synnott passed on Wednesday, October 22, 2014 surrounded by family and loved ones.

Throughout his long career, Dr. Synnott was known as a champion for students – all students, including those who are homeschooled. It was in 2003 that Dr. Synnott, a caring and visionary leader, created the Aurora Public Schools Option program. However, the seed for this concept began when Dr. Synnott was the principal of Devlin Junior and Senior High School from 1996-2000. During his tenure there, Dr. Synnott became involved with some homeschool families. He learned that some parents could not afford the quality curriculum they wanted and their children deserved.

So in 1996, Dr. Synnott started a program that would allow homeschool families to borrow curriculum to use during the school year without any cost to them. In order to do this he had to offer classes one day a week so that the public school system would pay for the textbooks. Thus H.O.P.E. (Home Options Program of Education) started as a program in Arvada with only thirty-five students. When Dr. Synnott became the Principal of Hinkley High School in the fall of 2000, word spread quickly that a public school administrator, friendly to home school, was in the Aurora Public Schools.

Dr. Synnott continued to expand the program in Aurora by offering homeschool students classes one-day per week taught by licensed teachers with small class sizes and access to curriculum that could be used at home. By the time he was ready to retire from Hinkley in 2002, Dr. Synnott had developed the basis for the program we have today. Knowing that the program could disappear without his leadership, he proposed to Aurora Public Schools that he be allowed to continue his work with the program under the district's direct sponsorship. The district agreed and Options School was born. By the end of its first year of operation in 2003-2004, the Options School had nearly 850 students. This was done without advertising but through word of mouth from parent to parent who learned that Dr. Synnott was an advocate for students who had created a program designed to complement home schooling – not replace it. He was trusted.

Dr. Synnott's guiding principle was to always put students first. All his decisions were based on this compelling philosophy. He hired a core staff who quickly dubbed themselves "the dream team" because of the opportunity to work with him and the Options School sites.

Soon the program exploded and by 2011-2012, Options School had nearly 2,000 students in 16 sites that stretched all along the Front Range. The success of the Options program caught the attention of other school districts that began offering their own programs. Douglas County, Jefferson, St. Vrain, Cherry Creek, Thompson school districts and others now have their own schools that support home-schooling with models similar to the Options School program.

That is why the life of Dr. Tom Synnott matters. His legacy will extend and endure beyond the number of years he spent on earth. Every student who is able to homeschool and experience public school and what it has to offer, can thank Dr. Synnott a man who cared deeply and sincerely that they have every opportunity available to them. His “dream team” is committed to the Options School and to honoring his vision.

For those wishing to honor his legacy, donations can be made to the Synnott Scholarship which is given annually to a graduating senior enrolled in Options School who is pursuing a college or technical school degree. Donations are tax deductible and 100% of donations go directly to the Scholarship fund. Please mail your donation to Options Synnott Scholarship, 11351 E. Montview Boulevard, Aurora, CO, 80010 or you may make a donation at <http://educateaurora.com/donate>. Please indicate that the use of your gift be used for the “Options Synnott Scholarship”. (For information on how to apply for the scholarship, see the Coordinator at your site.)