

Adams-Friendship Academic Hall of Fame 2024

Gerald Brien (1970)

After graduating from Adams-Friendship High School in 1970, Gerald “Jerry” Brien continued his education at UW-Stevens Point earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Communicative Disorders in 1974 and followed with a Master of Science degree in 1976. He spent 35 years as a Speech and Language Pathologist for the Kaukauna School District. After retirement, he continued working with students as a substitute in this area.

Mr. Brien has earned distinction as a Kaukauna Area Special Education Teacher of the Year, a finalist for Wisconsin Teacher of the Year, and was awarded a Kohl Fellowship. Along with recognition for excellence in the classroom and program development, he has also been active in supporting athletics and was honored by the Wisconsin Athletic Association-District 4 as a supportive leader who assists in maintaining athletics as an integral part of a total educational program. His activities and acknowledgements extend to numerous community organizations—Liturgical, Service, Government, and Fine Arts.

Though Mr. Brien’s contributions to school and community are numerous, his love of family also runs deep. He and wife, Kathy, have been married for 49 years with three daughters, two grandsons, and two stepsons. In 1982, he donated a kidney to his brother, Jim, who was inducted into the A-F Academic Hall of Fame in 2022 and continues to do well. Jerry carries on as an advocate for organ donation. He shares his story and, with his brother, participates in many ways to promote organ donation.

In his own words, Mr. Brien credits Adams-Friendship Schools for preparing him to perform for life:

“I am very grateful to all the past teachers who had an influence in my overall education. I start with Mrs. McFarlin, my first-grade teacher, who began my love of learning. What is unique is that when I began my student teaching in Nekoosa, Mrs. McFarlin was ending her 40th and final year at the school. We carpoled together where she continued to enlighten me with her wisdom of education. I was never disappointed with any of my grade school teachers.

My high school teachers strived to mold me for my future, always encouraging my best work. There were several who molded me to what I am today. Mr. LaValle always promoted excellence in music for this tuba playing student. Mr. Hunt and Mr. Craig always took an interest in my well-being. Mrs. Ducharme promoted me as a speaker, which I have used several times in my years. Mr. Manning promoted my interest in paying attention to the world around me and teaching me to evaluate issues to make the right decisions, including writing a letter to the editor to encourage people to vote for a new school. There was a time when both my mom and dad were in separate hospitals at the same time. My coaches, Mr.

Waller and Mr. Kolek, made sure that I was OK and continued to keep my focus. I vowed that given the opportunity, I wanted to pay that support forward and get involved someday in helping others. Mr. Sardeson, the Superintendent, took me to a Father-Son banquet, as he had only daughters.

The last person I wanted to write about is my guidance counselor, Mr. Sullivan. I told him I wanted to be a sports announcer. He told me there was no future in that but encouraged me to look at a new program at UW-Stevens Point called Communicative Disorders. I am not sure if it was because he had a speech problem himself, but he thought I would be good with kids. I took his advice which led to my 35 years as a Speech and Language Pathologist where I was able to make a difference for hundreds of students I worked with. My only regret was to be able to tell Mr. Sullivan I started to announce at school events.

'Mr. Sullivan, there was a future in announcing as I have now begun my 45th year announcing high school events.' I guess we were both right.

The very first letter I sent out when looking for my first job was to the Adams-Friendship School District. If there was an opening, I would have accepted. Unfortunately, there was no opening, and Kaukauna offered me a job. Kaukauna, however, can thank Adams-Friendship for making me the person I am."

When a song from "your decade" plays in your background, you return for a moment to another time and place. *Bridge Over Troubled Water* (1970), written by Paul Simon, summarizes Mr. Brien's life of service.

*... "If you need a friend
I'm sailing right behind
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will ease your mind
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will ease your mind..."*