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*Stop in and check out our newly opened Hooligans Restaurant! We have a full food menu, 12 beers on tap, full liquor bar, and 9 large screen TVs!*  
*-David & Melissa Gawlik*

**Story of a Local Gem**  
*Larry J. Pellet*



**Bertha Lowitzke**

Every now and then, a gem is uncovered from the annals of time, bringing to light – the very light – that in this case helped illuminate the early modern Fruitport Educational School System.

Upon a recent encounter at the Cloverville Eagles with Marsha Maxwell, granddaughter to the aforementioned gem Bertha Lowitzke, she reminisced about living with her grandparents on their farm at 5924 Sternberg Rd in the early 1950's. "That was one of the best 5 months of my life...it was heaven".

Though very young, Maxwell remembers Bertha's exploits in fundraising for school children, bringing Marsha to Christmas functions at Edgewood Elementary, and helping to set up the first Fruitport Board of Education. Notably, she was the secretary and only female on the board (and only mother), and also served prominently on the executive board in the Parents Teachers Association.

Lowitzke, who originated to Fruitport in 1943 from Detroit, was the keynote speaker in Fruitport's first JH/SR graduating class. In her speech, she described life as a structure we build every day, through faults and virtue, and implored students "to build strong and straight and true".

"She would do anything for those kids... she was just that kind of a woman", marveled Maxwell, who still possess those very speech notes.

Born in Ludington in 1893 as Bertha Lemke, she was the first of her German family to be born in America. She later married WW1 vet and policeman Arthur Lowitzke in 1919, before serving a term on the local Rhymer School District Board. Along the way, she had four children, one of whom is still alive, by the name of Leonard.

Leonard of Royal Oak and now at the ripe ole' age 92, remembers his mother as always keeping updated by reading the local newspapers, which peaked her interest in Fruitport. She became a regular at the school meetings, where she was recognized and eventually nominated to serve.

"She was always active", he fondly recalled his mother.

Dubbed a champion of consolidated education for her part in transforming and reorganizing Furnace Town from an agricultural school district into a consolidated school district, Lowitzke lived until the age of 58, serving continuously on the Board before a fall and blood clot lead to her untimely and surreal death in 1951.

In sorrow, and in honor of her life and career dedicated to the service of her community, the children of the district planted an Evergreen near the corner of Pontaluna and Sixth St, which was lit up for Christmas by Marsha herself. The ever-gregarious Noren Pattern Company donated a plaque inscribed with "Friend of ALL Children" to be placed near the tree.

Though the generation of that fabled time that cherished her has mostly faded from eternity's shore, Bertha's legacy lives on through her groundbreaking work and protégés – most notably Marsha's children Chris Close and Leanne Johnson-Sponaas. The former is a prominent musician in the Muskegon/Fruitport Area, and the latter of which is a student advocate in her own right, working on school drives for Fruitport's children.

One thing is for certain. Mrs. Bertha Lemke Lowitzke's energy, love and vision for our kids was instrumental in forging the invincible torch that the Trojan nation still carries - to this day.

One of many in a long chain of Fruitport dignitaries, no doubt an indelible link, she was a guardian angel to our storied history.



**Marsha Maxwell**