

The Metzler Legacy

How Two Siblings Shaped Education in Douglas County



Douglas County's roots reach deep into the mid-nineteenth century when homesteading families arrived and began to carve a living from the land. Over 150 years later, the footprints of the founding families can be seen across the county on parks, street names, and historic sites. One of these names is "Metzler." Today, you can visit the Metzler Ranch Community Park for a baseball game or return home to the Metzler Ranch neighborhood on the north side of Castle Rock.

The Douglas County School District (DCSD) will soon be another place where the Metzler name plays a part. The Foundation for Douglas County Schools (FDCS) will soon receive a grant from The Robert & Rosemary Metzler Family Education Fund. The donation will go to support underserved students through school supplies, scholarships, and literacy programs.

But this generous donation goes deeper than a philanthropic gesture. The last Metzlers, siblings Bob and Rosemary, helped shape the modern model of DCSD from the beginning of their careers in education. Their generosity will reverberate in Douglas County for years to come.

Douglas County Homesteaders

The Metzler roots go back to before the founding of Douglas County in 1861. Bob and Rosemary's grandparents, Patrick and Margaret Lucas, homesteaded in 1859 in what is now Castlewood Canyon State Park. Parts of their concrete house still stand today on the west end of the canyon. Patrick and Margaret's daughter, Mary, was an educational pioneer.

"Mary was one of the first women in her time in Douglas County to have a high school education," explains Ron Claussen, a volunteer at Castlewood Canyon State Park.

For much of Douglas County's early history, students have learned in one-room schoolhouses surrounded by children of different ages. If any student wished to pursue their high school diploma, they had to travel north towards Denver, a trek that few women chose to make.

However, in 1897, the first high school curriculum in the county was taught at Castle Rock High School, located in the current Cantril Building. Having a high school in the county gave greater access to educational opportunities for women like Mary and other families.

Mary Lucas's pursuit of education would set an example for her children for educational excellence.

Rosemary Metzler

The Legend of Douglas County High School

Rosemary graduated from Douglas County High School (DCHS) in 1947, then the only high school in the county. She would have attended school in what is currently the DCSD Wilcox Central Administration Building. She later returned as an English teacher and taught Creative Writing, Shakespeare, and AP English for 33 years.



“Not everybody liked her,” noted former student Carol Bradley, class of 1968. “She expected work, and she expected you to work at your potential. She was tough.”

Dr. Scott Self, another student of Rosemary from the class of 1987, remembers his larger-than-life English teacher from his Senior year.

“She was bigger than herself. She was a legend,” said Self. “First of all, she was ubiquitous. If students were involved in something, she was involved with it. She was always where we were.”

Students often saw Rosemary in the audience of theatre productions and sporting events, comfortable and welcome in the teenage world.

As Self explained, “She just really enjoyed her students. She enjoyed that we were immature and growing and learning and developing.”

That enjoyment translated into a learning environment unique to Rosemary’s classroom.

“It felt like she was pushing me to think critically and to think critically in ways that accepted my point of view and that what I saw in the text was valid and valuable,” recalled Self. “She created a learning environment where we took responsibility for our learning, took responsibility for our discovery, and we were rewarded for participating in that inquiry.”

Unsurprisingly, Rosemary’s influence as an educator extended beyond the DCHS campus.

She taught in Izmir, Turkey and Sierra Leone and was selected to participate in the festivities celebrating Shakespeare’s 400th Anniversary. She went on to study art, literature, and history on a European tour with other educators from the United States. Closer to home, Rosemary lectured at the University of Denver, led Colorado Language Arts Society conferences, and participated on the 1977 DCSD committee to improve teacher evaluation.

“As I’ve gotten older, I’ve discovered that there are women who are so strong and so powerfully sure of the role they play in the world around them,” said Self. “Overwhelming self-confidence and self-assuredness that she was unafraid of what we thought about her, what we thought about who she was, was irrelevant to her own view of herself.”

After retiring, Rosemary published several children’s books: “Snooty the Fox and the Mysterious Black Box,” “Snooty the Fox Meets Dead-Eye Dick,” and “Snooty the Fox.” The books were illustrated by her partner and former DCHS music teacher, Gay Lankenau. They captured rural ranch life, a time that was gone for most people.

Rosemary and Gay lived at the Metzler Ranch until Gay’s death in 2010 and Rosemary’s death in 2017.



Bob Metzler

The Trailblazing Educator and Superintendent

Rosemary's brother, Bob, was another education innovator. He began his teaching career in a one-room classroom and used that experience to build an educational philosophy based on individualized learning for each student.



"In a one-room schoolhouse, children had to work at their own level," explained Linda Lander, former Physical Education teacher for Clear Creek County School District.

"He believed in the whole person learning. Everyone was interested in something, and curiosity could be brought out in people," said Mary Jane Louvlie, a family friend of Bob in Idaho Springs, CO. "He was one of those people who was an innovator. He saw computers before they were happening."

Bob was elected as Douglas County Superintendent in 1952 and continued serving through the reorganization of DCSD RE-1 in 1958. In 1964, he took on the Superintendship of Clear Creek County Schools in Idaho Springs, CO. He moved shortly after into the historic Dupont Castle, known locally as Castle Eyrie.

Bob also traveled across the country to speak about a new, cutting-edge teaching style on media outlets and professional conferences. He especially focused on new technologies like tele-education and other technological innovations that would make education more accessible to more students, especially in rural communities.

During an interview with KLX and CBS radio in 1963, he proclaimed: "The essential problem for education posed

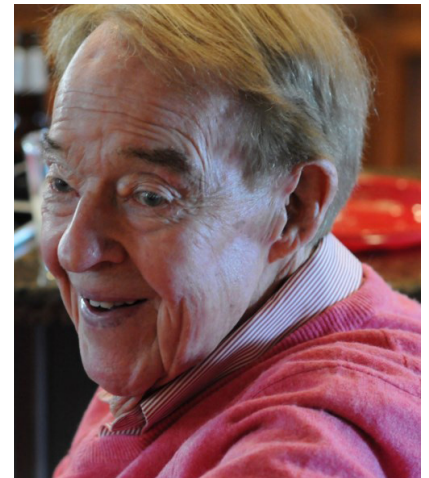
by new technology is educating all of our people for a new age of technology, educating all of our people for an opportunity to work, earn a living and find a place to make a worthwhile contribution to our society."

"We must become cognizant of the fact that citizens of America will become perpetual students in keeping up with automation and new discoveries." Much like we see today in individualized learning tailored students' needs, including technical education, to excel in various fields.

Bob's education philosophy manifested into practice in the Clear Creek Secondary School, which he designed in Idaho Springs.

"We had a state-of-the-art media center," recalled Lander. "Bob called it the Tower of Learning. They said there was nothing like it between Chicago and L.A. I think he was an educational genius. I don't think many people can have a clear idea and then implement it. I personally can't name one that did what Bob Metzler did."

Bob's education philosophies and practices were years ahead of his time. He passed away in Idaho Springs in 2020.



Ushering Douglas County Into The Future

Bob served as Superintendent just before the rural Douglas County saw massive population growth and development into bustling suburban neighborhoods. The 1960 census showed 4,815 residents of Douglas County, compared to the 379,000 of the 2020 census.

The Metzler family helped contribute to the rapid growth. In 1984, the Metzler Ranch, just north of Founders Parkway, annexed a large portion of their land to the town of Castle Rock. A single homestead became home for thousands as housing and commercial development blossomed in the area.



One of Bob's successors as Superintendent, Rick O'Connell, saw firsthand how Bob's

educational philosophy paved the way for the transition from rural to suburban. During Rick's tenure alone from 1981-2003, DCSD expanded from 3,000 students to 40,000, building up to 10 schools in a single year.

"We were at the forefront of a lot of innovation," recounted O'Connell. "We were able to hire a lot of young and up-and-coming principals and teachers who wanted to innovate and be creative. Which is partly why Douglas County became so popular because of the quality of the school district and the quality of the people."



Continuing Their Legacy

Now the Metzler estate wants to pass on their love of learning to future generations through educational grants from the Robert & Rosemary Metzler Family Education Fund.



DCSD has been selected as a beneficiary alongside other educational institutions near and dear to Bob and Rosemary, like the University of Denver and Colorado Mountain College. The gift will be made to the Foundation for Douglas County Schools (FDCS), the nonprofit nexus between DCSD and the greater community.

FDCS will ensure the Metzlers' gift will champion programs that help underserved students. The donation will help FDCS help more students start the school year with the supplies they need, provide annual student assistance through scholarships to DCSD programs and post-secondary education, and support district-wide reading and literacy programs for students and families.

Thanks to their generosity and commitment to education, Bob and Rosemary have ensured that their legacy will benefit students across the state and in DCSD.

*Stacy Blaylock
Douglas County School District
August 2021*