



Honoring the Vision of Dick and Liz Brenner: Rooted in Community, Focused on the Basics

The Cloquet Educational Foundation (CEF) is proud to announce the establishment of the Dick and Elizabeth Brenner Fund for Quality Education—a lasting tribute to two individuals whose vision and dedication have helped shape the educational landscape of the Cloquet School District. Dick and Liz Brenner are deeply rooted in the Cloquet community, known for their unwavering commitment to service, connection, and generosity. From the very beginning of the CEF, they have been strong and active supporters, always championing the belief that every child deserves the opportunity to thrive through quality education.

In 1985, Dick Brenner recognized a growing need within the district and took action, helping to create what would become the Cloquet Educational Foundation. With a focus on strengthening opportunities for early learners and enhancing classroom experiences, Dick's leadership helped grow the CEF into a vital and trusted resource for students and educators. His philosophy has always been clear and grounded in purpose. As Dick often says, *“Reading engagement, math principals, and adding a spirit to learning—getting back to the basics of education.”* That belief continues to guide this endowment and the work it will support.

Dick's professional and public service record reflects that same steady commitment to fundamentals and forward thinking. A graduate of Minnesota State University, Mankato, where he earned both a BS and a BA degree, Dick built a career rooted in financial leadership and accountability. He retired in 1999 from the Potlatch Corporation Fine Paper Division and also served as Controller at the Northwest Paper Mill, now Sappi, overseeing accounting staff and operations with integrity and precision. Beyond his professional career, Dick dedicated 32 years to Carlton County as a County Commissioner, working to solve problems and chart a path toward a stronger future for the county for more than three decades. He also devoted 17 years to the Cloquet School Board, advocating for students, supporting educators, and helping shape policies that strengthened the district.

Liz's commitment to education and lifelong learning is equally remarkable. A 1960 graduate of Cloquet High School, Liz devoted 25 years to the Northeast Regional Correctional Center (NERCC), where she spent 13 years teaching special education before serving 12 years as Facility Program Director. Dick describes her as creative, energetic, and a “Big Thinker,” Liz has always believed that education must evolve to meet the needs of students. As she

shared, *“Seeing the changes in education, we need to make sure students are engaged and rising to the changes. One of the keys to education is exposure to many different areas.”* Her work ensured that students in alternative settings were not only supported but inspired to see new possibilities for their futures.

Together, Dick and Liz raised a blended family of eight children and are proud and thankful that all of them attended and thrived in Cloquet Schools. Their personal experience as parents further strengthened their belief in the power of strong public education grounded in fundamentals, opportunity, and engagement.

The Dick and Elizabeth Brenner Endowment for Quality Education ensures that future generations of Cloquet students will continue to benefit from a stable, high-quality education rooted in strong fundamentals. Their legacy reflects a shared conviction: that when students are engaged, supported, and exposed to broad opportunities, they flourish. Through this fund, their vision—anchored in service, leadership, and a spirit of learning—will continue to uplift and inspire the Cloquet community for generations to come.