



Irene McCracken taught at Dixie Heights High School in Edgewood for 25 years and has been a volunteer there 54 years, including many years at the visitor's gate at football games, the concession stand or ticket sales. THE ENQUIRER/PATRICK REDDY

# She puts her heart in Dixie

By Sarah Hardee

Enquirer contributor

**EDGEWOOD** — If you've attended a football game at Dixie Heights High School in the past 50 years, chances are you've met one of the school's longest-serving volunteers.

Irene Harris McCracken has been volunteering for more than half a century at the school's home football games, and the retired educator has been cheering on the Colonels from the sidelines for most of her life.

For 54 years, McCracken has helped the team in just about every volunteer position, from concessions to ticket sales — and the 82-year-old retired Dixie teacher doesn't plan on leaving any time soon.

"I dearly love it," McCracken said of

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# McCracken

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giving up countless Friday nights to volunteer for the Colonels.

"They've always had a place for me, and I love staying involved.

"Dixie was home to me for many, many years."

McCracken, of Erlanger, started her teaching career in 1952 at Erlanger's Lloyd Memorial High School.

She moved to Dixie in 1959, where she taught physical education and driver's education, and later business courses.

During her 32-year teaching career - and 25 years at Dixie - McCracken left a positive imprint on everything she touched, according to 1979 Dixie alumna Sue Wadsworth.

"I've never seen her without a smile on her face, and you can't help but smile back," said Wadsworth, who now teaches science at her alma mater.

"As a teacher, and as a volunteer, she brightens our day.

"The positive effect she's had on Dixie students is immeasurable."

For her long service to the school, Wadsworth helped lead the charge to honor McCracken at Dixie's Sept. 7 home-opener. During halftime, McCracken was surprised with a special en-

semble from Dixie's band, a football signed by the coaches and players, and a sign proclaiming the walkway near the entrance gate where she regularly volunteers "Irene McCracken Way."

The recognition was a well-deserved honor for the longtime volunteer, said Dixie Athletic Director Matt Wilhoite.

"She's very dedicated to our players, and she enjoys what she does," he said.

In addition to volunteering at football games during her teaching years at Dixie, McCracken led the school's "Colonettes" drill squad, coached six teams of cheerleaders, led the pep squad and ran the school's bookstore.

She was an advocate for teachers and students - and she was never afraid to shake things up.

She helped to ensure teachers had a voice at the district level, she said, and in the 1960s had a hand in changing the school policy at Dixie that required female teachers and students to wear dresses or skirts.

For McCracken, who also fought to take the traditionally male-dominated education course at the University of Kentucky for certification to teach high school driver's education courses, fighting for what she believed in was sometimes an uphill battle in the 1950s and '60s.

"It was very different for women in those days, especially those of us involved in physical education," she said.

"Title IX changed a lot - it was a great thing for women."

McCracken raised two daughters in Northern Kentucky with her husband, Milton McCracken, who was also an educator.

She retired from Dixie in 1984, switched careers and became a funeral director at Middendorf Bullock Funeral Home.

"She's such a caring person, and she's thrived in both careers," Wadsworth said of McCracken. "She has a special intuitiveness that's allowed her to reach both struggling students and grieving families."

McCracken, a self-described "gym rat," is also a huge University of Kentucky basketball fan, and she's traveled all over the country to support her alma mater over the years.

Also a fan of Dixie's band, McCracken makes a \$1,000 donation to support the group each year.

And, as much as possible, she stays in touch with her former students and their families from Dixie and Lloyd since her retirement.

"I've had so many outstanding students who have gone on to do great things after high school," she said.

"It's rewarding to think that I had even a small part in that."