

The Panther Den On-Line

by Genie Forst Boyer

July 3, 2001

Elwood, Indiana: A small town in the center of Indiana known as the birthplace of Wendell L. Willkie, Presidential Candidate in 1940 and author of One World. Also known as the home of Red Gold Tomato Products, the fastest growing tomato products in the United States. Home of Dunn Rite Pool products, J Lewis Small class rings, St. Clair Glass, and the Elwood Glass Festival.

But perhaps Elwood's most well-known citizen is one who is not famous. One who will never be noticed in the annals of History. And one who will go to his grave unmarked by the majority of people. Yet, he has probably had more effect on graduates of Elwood High School than any of the above mentioned items. This man, Marvin Crim, Wendell L. Willkie High School graduate of 1957 is remarkable beyond the bounds of the ordinary. He has done something no one else has done anywhere. He has created a web site which links its members together in a remarkable group.

This group is called The Panther Den. It is named for the gathering place of high school students in old Wendell L. Willkie High School. In the old Panther Den students would gather each noon after lunch, on Wednesday evenings, after ball games, and on other special occasions to dance, listen to music, play pool, gossip and just in general hang out. On the modern day Panther Den, almost 500 people with links to Elwood High School are joined by their computers. Through the homepages created by Crim and through email, these persons correspond on a daily basis trading stories of their home town, their childhood, school days, memories of friends and also share their modern lives. While most members are graduates of Wendell L. Willkie High School (Elwood Community High School since the 1970's), some are spouses, children, or parents of graduates. There are also members who attended school in Elwood, but did not graduate for one reason or another. Ages of the group run from its oldest member Robert Benedict, 92, to students currently in high school. Members can be found in almost all the 50 states and it boasts one member from China.

As stated on its web site The Panther Den's purpose is "To provide a communication link for everyone interested in Elwood High School, Wendell L. Willkie High School, and

Elwood Community High School along with all the grand people, buildings, and events associated with them.”

The Panther Den Web site includes along with its opening pages a photo gallery of many members which have been submitted over the years. There is a Notes Page where members can listen to music that Crim has put there for enjoyment. There is a “Without Them” section which is dedicated to people that have been important to members of the Den. It includes teachers, graduates, and citizens of Elwood who have made a difference in this world. Another feature of the Den site is “The Megaphone”, an on-line newspaper which is named for the high school newspaper. Members of the group submit stories on a monthly basis to Crim who organizes and “publishes” their efforts. A final feature of the Web site is “The Hall Clock”. The Megaphone that members remember had regular gossip column called the Hall Clock. This updated version written by Crim is full of comments and roastings of various members that Crim has gleaned from email and conversations of the past week.

Crim who is affectionately called “Doc” (Dr. Frankenstein) by the members of the group is assisted in his efforts by his “Mod Squad” a group of 12 moderators who help in running the group’s day-to-day activities. He has his loyal assistant “Igor”, Loretta Jarvis Dodd for a sounding board, and “Sys” Teresa Dickey Hollowell to help him with the technical side of the site. Our very special moderator Sharon Benedict Hurst, aka Angel # 2, keeps us aware of Breast Cancer research and runs the local Breast Cancer Awareness Group. The “Birthday Goirls”, Lynn Davies Funk and Genie Forst Boyer, who keep track of members’ birthdays and anniversaries and send e-cards to commemorate these events. “Mama Duck” Vicki Hull Wardwell is responsible for the Prayer Panthers which accepts prayer requests from members in need of help and also who recently coordinated a Silent Auction at the group’s Annual meeting Denstock II with proceeds going to a high school scholarship.

At the group’s email site, pantherden@yahoogroups.com, one finds the email letters that have been sent by members through the years. There are also files which contain photos, recipes, and various other informational tidbits that members have contributed. Membership is limited to those with links to the school city of Elwood and must be approved.

The group meets several times a year for parties and get-togethers. They celebrated Christmas and New Years as well as having a Birthday party on April 1 to commemorate

the group's 2nd anniversary. A skating party was held at the local skating rink which is about to be closed and torn down. Many members remember skating there while growing up and wanted one last chance to skate before it was gone. The group participated in both the Elwood Glass Festival and Homecoming Parades last year and is planning to do so again this year.

But the big celebration held each year is Denstock. This year was Denstock II. It is a huge celebration held in Callaway Park in Elwood on June 23. Both years there have been well over 200 members and guests in attendance. Denstock includes many activities. There is music from the '50's and 60's being played over speakers; a program in which gifts---both gag and serious---are given to members. This year's gifts included one for Bob Benedict the oldest in attendance and Jack Gootee who traveled the farthest having come from China. Members held a pitch-in lunch. There was a silent auction managed by Vicki Wardwell with assistance from members Catherine "Toots" Pethoud. Members donated all sorts of items for auction. Some were homemade. Others were high school or Elwood souvenirs. The proceeds from the auction were donated to the high school to be given to a graduating senior as a scholarship in memory of a "passing Panther" i.e. a member who has died within the last year. The auction raised \$1000 for this cause. There was also a quilt made by Wardwell which was given as a door prize to Rick Rogers, Class of '67. Denstock III will be held in Callaway Park again on June 15, 2002.

In addition to the Denstock II held in Elwood, there was also a Southwest Den Meet held in February in Phoenix, AZ, and a meet held in Knoxville, TN this spring. Plans are in place to repeat these meets and to perhaps have meets in other locals such as central Florida next year.

Members of the Panther Den think Marvin Crim has created a site that is unique among web sites. They have not heard of anyplace else that has such a site. Crim will be remembered by many for his creation of this remarkable web site and for the many lives he has brought together in such a unique and unusual way.