



Local news

It was Barney Hefner Day



News Photos — Michael Moore
Barney Hefner listens as friends praise and roast him at a retirement banquet Friday night.

SOUTHBRIDGE — Barney Hefner, who left American Optical Corporation last week after 43 years with the company, enjoyed a surprise retirement party last Friday night. More than 250 co-workers, business associates and friends gathered at Rom's Restaurant to honor him, roast him and wish him well.

Retired along with Hefner was his trademark, a number 21 football jersey, a legacy from his athlete days at Southbridge High School. He put the shirt on obligingly for his audience and said, with remarkable restraint: "can't believe it. It still fits."

Donald Marino, athletic director and football coach for the high school, took the mike: "As we all know, Proposition 2½ has cut available monies for most of our athletic programs. I am pleased to say that a Barney Hefner Fund of \$5,500 has been raised by his friends and business associates to carry on his interest in the athletic arena. We will use the fund, in his honor, to purchase three pieces of heavy-duty athletic equipment for the school and new football uniforms for the team."

He pointed out that fund-raising for the award was captained successfully by Norman F. Nelson at AO.

"This is one of the largest gifts we have ever received," said Edward Desroches, Southbridge High School principal. "Along with accepting the Hefner award, we return the compliment by awarding him the Clair O. Power Memorial Award, a tribute to his continuing interest,

and devotion to, high school athletics."

Many of his co-workers and former associates teased Hefner playfully about his Southbridge upbringing and education (on and off the playing field), viewed slides from his earlier years and, in a serious vein, called attention to his role in the town's burgeoning interest in athletic events. Interspersed were stand-up toasts and put-down comments from the assembled guests.

Gene Lewis, president of AO, had a few things to say about Hefner: "I'm sure our place will never be the same without you. (Assembled guests murmured "amen")." Lewis continued, unperturbed: "I

remember your application from August 29, 1938. It said you were short, curly-haired, stout and intelligent. On the basis of the last entry, AO thought you belonged." Lewis then presented Hefner with a silver platter-tray, engraved with the date of Hefner's retirement.

A proclamation from the Southbridge Town Council was then read by Rosemary Simonds, an AO employee as well as a council-committee member. The proclamation, signed by Donald Jacobs, town manager, declared Saturday, March 6, "Barney Hefner Day." Several other gifts were offered, including a bronzed shoe, mounted on a plaque — ac-

companied by the comment "because the shoe fits, Barney."

Applaud was accorded Terri Ciesla, Hefner's assistant at AO, for organizing the farewell dinner and for acting as catalyst among Hefner and his friends.

Then, Barney Hefner: "The name of my game is people. I've met some nice, wonderful ones, including you out there in the room." Aside from audience: "Hurrah, Barney, but don't forget to check on your pension."

Hefner was undaunted: "You at American Optical have people of charisma running this company today. I would like to be part of that. But, for now, thanks and good-bye."

Grandfathers unite behind Barney

Benjamin Franklin, a.k.a. Henry Burnett of American Optical, played the leading role in Barney Hefner's toast-for-retirement ceremony.

"Ben" said: "I'm one of the grandfathers of this nation and I'm here to honor another grandfather. We have something in common: We both represent the optical industry."

Ben-Henry was calling attention to the small, oval-shaped metal-rimmed bifocals he was wearing, which were made especially for the occasion by AO lens specialists, following the originator's design — Ben Franklin, the father of bifocals.

"I am one of the original products of the American system. I like to think of Barney and me as boys together in earlier times, back in Boston in the 18th century," he said. "I know I was a printer's devil in my

