

March 18, 2022

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: STEVEN CARMINA '74

Architect Steven Carmina is a graduate of West Seneca East Senior High's first ever freshman class, graduating with the class of 1974. He is certain that if not for one highly inspirational teacher near the end of his high school career, he may not be where he is now.

Carmina is the President/CEO of [Carmina Wood Morris, DPC](#), an architectural firm in downtown Buffalo, whose scope of work ranges from the preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of iconic Buffalo landmarks, to interior business spaces. One look at the company's website, linked above, attests to Carmina's stature as a powerhouse in the industry. And it all started in West Seneca as a lark of sorts.

From the West Side of Buffalo, Carmina's family moved to West Seneca where he attended Allendale Elementary when he was 11 years old in 1967, then went on to East Middle. He remembers well, the elaborate Industrial Arts wing in West Seneca East High, where a student could participate in wood shop, print shop, drafting, welding, and more. In junior high and high school, he also participated in music and sports: chorus, saxophone, clarinet, track, football, and soccer. He recalls how, as part of East High's first class of freshmen, students were given a list of colors and names to vote on the newly formed school's colors and mascot.

"We chose green and gold because the Green Bay Packers were the NFL champs that year, and Trojans after the University of Southern California's football team who won the Rose Bowl in 1969 season," Carmina says. East is still identified by the green and gold and Trojans to this day.

In the spring of Carmina's junior year, without a clear idea of what he wanted to do career-wise, a classmate suggested he take a mechanical drawing class from Mr. Palumbo. Ralph Palumbo was a young teacher with a lot of energy, who taught drafting and was also a tennis and soccer coach, after being a legendary college soccer player himself.

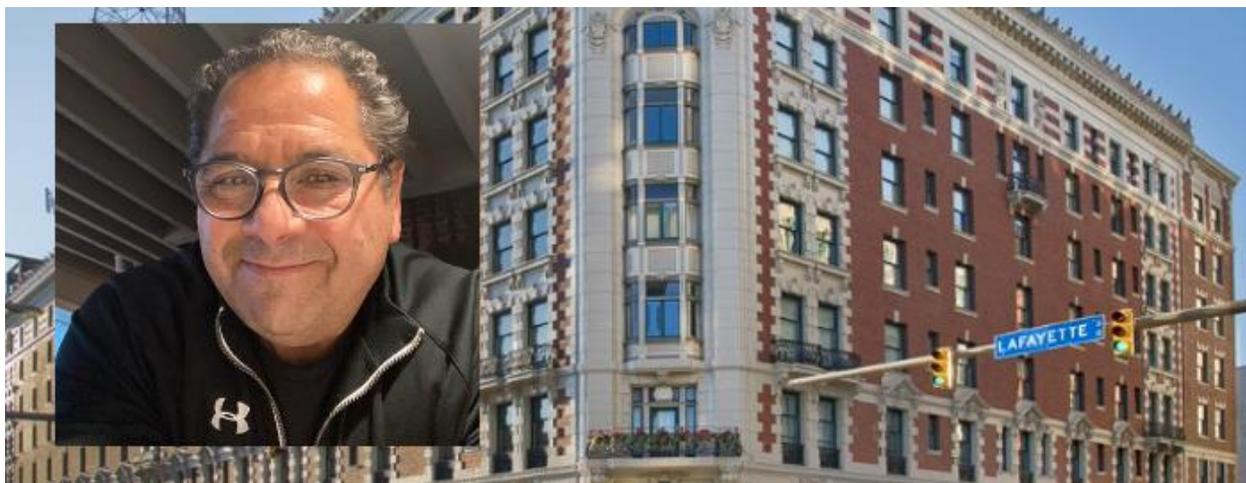
Carmina, who grew up working alongside his father in all his typical homeowner fix-it endeavors, was inclined to understand “how things work” and took to mechanical drawing quickly. Mr. Palumbo, seeing his aptitude, told Carmina to skip the next drawing class and go into the architecture program his senior year.

After graduating, Steve Carmina attended Buffalo State with the thought of becoming a teacher like his mentor, Mr. Palumbo. Due to the richness of his West Seneca teachers’ attention, however, he says he felt bored and decided to take a gap year – before that was a popular option. After a year of bartending at Uncle Sam’s, a popular area disco, Carmina went to Alfred State where he received an AAS in Architecture and then went on to the University at Buffalo’s School of Architecture and Planning, where he received a Bachelors in Professional Studies/Architecture.

Carmina partnered to open Carmina Silvestri in Amherst in 1990, and then in 2000 was convinced that the future of architecture was going to be in the City of Buffalo, so he opened Carmina Wood in downtown Buffalo in 2001. The company is now Carmina Wood Morris, employing 33 people locally, and with newly established offices in Greensborough, North Carolina.

Carmina’s mother still resides in West Seneca, Mr. Palumbo is doing well, and for a time, Carmina’s firm maintained a scholarship in his name in the West Seneca School system. Contemporaries now, he and his former teacher are friends to this day. Carmina looks back on his years in the West Seneca Schools as a fabulous contributor during his early years. “It’s a great school system,” he says. “I feel like there is no one left there from my era, but it had a great influence on me, and my three sisters before me.”

You’re welcome back any time, Steve. Maybe there’s an East Middle School Career Café in your near future for any of our budding architects who may need your inspiration!



CAREER CAFÉ AT EAST MIDDLE

East Middle School hosted a professional Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) athlete during a recent Career Cafe session. Career Cafes feature a variety of professionals from different backgrounds. The school's counselors, Warren Yokom and Ann Marie Canaple try to schedule up to two sessions per month, basing guests on students' interest inventories. This week's guest, Sean Felton, has a Blue Belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and competes in Muay Thai Kickboxing. He also works at WNY MMA & Fitness as an MMA coach. Sean shared his story with the students about being a Buffalo native, as well as a graduate of Williamsville North High School and Buffalo State College, with a degree in Criminal Justice. Sean sparred with Dr. Carol Angiers, a 6th grade teacher and gym manager. Sean encouraged our students to strive for success and give back to the community. "Hard work pays, dreams come true, and bad times don't last," Hall said. Student Blake Kempa said, "The MMA techniques were really cool and Dr. Angiers took some hard hits!" Next up: a civil/wastewater engineer followed by a cosmetologist.



WEST MIDDLE FIELD TRIPS

Field trips are back, and West Middle is enjoying field trips each Tuesday and Wednesday in March at the Buffalo Niagara Court Center (BNCC) at 425 Meyer Road. Principal David Kean says, "We wanted to create an opportunity for our kids to have some time to socialize and simply have fun outside of the classroom, and the BNCC was kind enough to host at a reduced cost, co-funded by both the Parent Teacher Student Association and students. Transportation Director Linda O'Grady facilitated the transportation and West Middle's wonderful kitchen crew prepped bagged lunches for each team. The result has been absolutely joyful, with teachers and students involved in games, contests, and social interactions in this unique environment.



PAWS OF LOVE @ WINCHESTER POTTERS

Winchester Potters school counselor Lea O'Malley arranged for a visit from Lucky, the therapy dog, through the Paws for Love animal visitation therapy program of the SPCA of Erie County. Lucky's visit came after students learned about therapy dogs and their importance to humans. These therapy dogs serve as a valuable part of our students' social emotional learning, teaching them a new perspective on being "Respectful, Responsible and Ready to Learn". Every Friday throughout March and April, each grade level will have the opportunity to meet a therapy dog. Most of the students, of course, either have pets at home or know someone who does, but Lucky's visit at school was a rare treat for everyone. Therapy dogs, according to the SPCA, lower feelings of stress and anxiety that can be overwhelming at times. The students were gentle and respectful of Lucky and hope he visits again soon.



JAZZY HAPPENINGS AT WEST SENIOR

On Thursday, March 10, jazz legend Pat LaBarbera and members of his quintet performed with students at the annual West Seneca Senior High Jazz Festival Concert.

LaBarbera has traveled the world as a member of the Buddy Rich Big Band, the Elvin Jones Jazz Machine, and many other notable jazz masters. Here, he performed with the West Senior Jazz Ensemble, directed by John Hasselback, while drummer John Bacon, Jr. and bassist Paul LaDuca performed with West Senior's Vocabella and Vocal Jazz Ensembles, directed by Keith Ersing. Part of the focus of this concert was to provide the students with a chance to hear great professional level Jazz musicians perform, and the concert included a set by the Pat LaBarbera Quintet, including John Hasselback on trombone, Lisa Hasselback on piano, Paul Laduca on bass and John Bacon, Jr. on drums.



The Pat LaBarbera Quintet



Vocal Jazz Ensemble with Guest Artists



West Senior Jazz Ensemble with guest Pat LaBarbera

NATIONAL SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS WEEK!

These past couple of years have certainly been trying for all of us, especially for our children. Our Social Workers have done an amazing job to make sure our students are supported, our families are taken care of, and they are always available for faculty and staff on any given day. In addition, there are countless interventions that happen behind the scenes confidentially to support our students and families in need, all thanks to our outstanding Social Work Team. We appreciate all of your time, hard work, support, and dedication to the students and families in our community!



Social Workers and Counselors

SUPERINTENDENT'S CONFERENCE DAY

Do you ever wonder what teachers do on Superintendent's Conference Days while students are given a day off? They work! All over the District today, in groups large and small, in-person and remote, all WSCSD employees engaged in various forms of training, professional development, data review, planning, and everything else imaginable that will allow us to finish the year to the benefit of our students and families - like the well-oiled machine we are! I am so proud of our staff and their level of attention to the duties at hand.



Enjoy your weekend!

Matthew Bystrak
Superintendent