

# **The History of Joliet East High School**

## **KINGSMEN**

Year Opened	Fall 1964
Year Closed	Spring 1983
JT East Principals	Mr. James Risk Mr. William Odenthal (Deceased) Mr. Leroy Leslie Mr. Mel May (Deceased) Ms. Arlene Urquhart
JT East Name	Kingsmen
JT East School Colors	Kelly Green, Gold and White
JT East Mascot	Lion
JT East Newspaper	Kingsmen Courier
JT East Yearbook	Crown
JT East Loyalty	"Oh, Hail the Kingsmen"

The music to the JT East loyalty song was taken from tune of the U.S. Navy song, "Navy Blue and Gold."  
The words to the loyalty were then written to fit that same tune.

## **JT EAST LOYALTY**

"Oh, hail the Kingsmen, mighty Kingsmen  
school of green and gold.  
We'll fight for the right to prove  
our might against our mighty foes.  
Rah, rah!

Oh, East our pride will never cease  
for victory is our goal.  
Our battle cry for JT East  
is "Onward we will go."

We'll follow you to victory  
Kingsmen will reign on high.  
Our loyalty, our pride, our might  
will never fade or die.  
Rah, rah!

There's none so fair, none can compare  
if they be new or old.  
For we'll 'ere be loyal to  
Kingsmen green and gold.

Cheer: K-i-n-g-s-m-e-n The best!  
Yea! Kingsmen Fight!

(Note: Paula Hurst is credited for writing the words for the Kingsmen loyalty/fight song.)

During JT East's 19-year history, the Kingsmen and the Lady Kingsmen enjoyed excellent athletic seasons. Girls' sports included basketball, softball volleyball, badminton, and gymnastics. The boys' played basketball, baseball, football, wrestling, soccer, golf and hockey. Kingsmen and Lady Kingsmen also competed in track and field events, cross country meets, swimming meets, and tennis tournaments.

The East teams and the individual athletes in the various sporting contests brought many honors, awards, championships, conference titles, and I-8 titles to the East campus.

*Special mention:* Dale O'Connell, Sr. came to JT East from Penn High School located in Mishawaka, Indiana. He was East's first PE teacher and a coach when East opened its doors in '64. He was a beloved faculty member and following his death, the gymnasium at East was named for him.

The headline: "East Wins Illini 8 Conference Championship."

The story according to the 1968 yearbook... "How sweet it is," was the phrase used by the Joliet Herald News to describe East's valiant rally to victory in the 1967 football season. From the very first game to the last, the Green and Gold never eased up on its deathlike defense and continually stunned opponents with its fast moving, hard-driving offense. The team became known as "The Green Machine!"

Hard work and dedication were the keys to the success of the varsity football team. However, the success of the Kingsmen relied on something just as important as skill and commitment. The entire East student body was their encouragement and driving spirit throughout the whole season and it never let up until the varsity team became more than just the champion of the Illini-8. In 1967, it became the "Pride of East!" Coaches were Lloyd Atterbury, Chuck Blackwell, and Ned Vargo.

"The Green Machine" – Bob Major, Tom Miller, Bob Pierson, Rowan McQuarrie, Gordon Meade, David Sharp, Lannie Crudup, Ted Swanick, Ray McDonald, Bob Criscione, John Martin, Irv McDonald, Mike O'Connell. After conference play ended, John Martin, Duke McDonald, and Bob Criscione were named to the all-conference team.

Coach Elmer Bell arrived on the JT East baseball scene in 1967 to take charge of the team. Two months later, East had won the first varsity championship in the school's history. In 1968, the Kingsmen ballplayers became the "kings of the diamond" as they won the first regional championship in East history by ending the season with a 17-5 record. This team set a standard for future Kingsmen to strive for.

When speaking about sports, "Dwyer's Flyers" have to be mentioned. According to the 1981 Crown yearbook, the girls' basketball team finished the season posting a 27-5 record under the coaching of Bob Dwyer and Tom Cawley. The Flyers were conference, regional, sectional and super-sectional champs!

The "spirit makers" were the cheerleaders and the pom pon squads. Their enthusiasm and creative routines added to every event in which they participated. K-i-n-g-s-m-e-n, the Best! That was the battle cry of Joliet East Cheerleaders while the poms supplied the spirit boost.

East campus organizations included the National Honor Society, DECA (Distribution Education Club of America), Industrial Arts Club, Earth Science Club, Red Cross Service Corps, Art Club, Future Farmers of America, Future Homemakers of America, Future Teachers of America, Business Club, Ushers Club, Medical Careers Club, Speech and Drama Club, Chess Club, Stamp and Coin Club, ROTC, Ski Club, Student Council, Media Club, and Math, German and French clubs.

The largest club on campus was OBAY (Organization for Black American Youth.) The group annually presented a talent and fashion show which featured singing, dancing and the latest fashions. Clarice Boswell was the OBAY sponsor and a high inspiration for the students.

East's notable performing arts history includes the Kingsmen Players, KoLage, treble choir, madrigals, ACapella choir, general choir and glee club. Legendary directors of the choirs were Robert Howell and Arlyne Nuti who also directed lavish East musicals (operettas). East's first operetta was "Brigadoon." Howell was its Production Coordinator and Musical Director. Over the years East audiences enjoyed such musicals as "The King and I", "The Sound of Music," "Funny Girl," "West Side Story," "Hello Dolly," "Oklahoma," and "The Music Man" to name just a few. The productions always drew rave reviews.

KoLage was an unusual name for an unusual swing choir. It was comprised of talented students with high energy and high enthusiasm. The name was created because the group was a mixture of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Annually KoLage performed their creative singing and dancing routines in several shows, not only at school functions, but throughout the Chicagoland area as well.

A longtime East theater director was Ron Martin, Drama Teacher. East students who performed in the annual fall and winter dramatic plays were well known as the Kingsmen Players. Their productions were always a success. Martin challenged his casts acting ability with such intricate plays as "The Man Who Came to Dinner," "The Glass Menagerie," and "Arsenic and Old Lace."

Great East bands included the concert band, pep band, and jazz band. The concert band played special concerts throughout the Chicagoland area as well as traveling to Colorado in 1966. While in the Rockies, the band toured several landmarks and performed at Fort Logan, the Civic Center and the national Jewish Hospital.

In 1968, the East band was invited to perform as the featured band in two parades at Disneyland (at that time JT East was the first band to travel such a distance to perform at Disneyland.) While out west, the East musicians saw the sights touring Mexico along with several California landmarks.

Throughout the years, the Marching Kingsmen were invited to perform in nearly every state and in Canada. At home, the band could always be heard at pep assemblies, football games, and boys' and girls' basketball games. Among the East band directors were Marshall Erickson (1964-1980), Mike Fiske (1980-81), and William Leafblad (1981-1983.)

The accomplished musicians of the High School Orchestra were students of East, West and Central. This combined program was under the very able direction of Peter Labela. The orchestra annually participated in each of the school's operettas and in the Christmas concerts.

JT East athletes included in the naming of the "100 Athletes of the Century" as part of the centennial activities celebrated by District 204 in 2001 are the following:

**Pam Gant '81** Pam led the East girls' basketball team to a 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish at the state tournament in 1980. She scored 75 points and holds state records for field goals in a season with 443, and in a career with 1431. Pam posted 3,205 points for her high school career to become the number one scorer in the state and the third leading scorer in the nation. She was named All-state three times. She went on to LSU on a full scholarship where she received All-American honors playing basketball.

**Tim Graf '76** An outstanding track and field athlete. He was State Champion 100 yard dash at East and Big Ten 100 yard dash Champion at Indiana University. Tim qualified for the 1980 Olympics.

**Larry Gura '65** A Kingsman standout left-handed pitcher who went on to play baseball for Arizona State. His major league career included playing for the Chicago Cubs, New York Yankees and Kansas City Royals. In 1980, Larry was named an American League All-Star.

**John Gurka '75** In 1974 and 1975, John was the State Heavyweight

Wrestling Champion. In addition, he was an All-State football player in 1974. John was the 1974-75 Wrestler USA Magazine High School All-American.

NOTE: In addition to the above athletes, many East athletes were also named to the roster of "Distinguished Athletes of the Century" in 2001.

JT East athletes inducted into the Joliet Area Sports Hall of Fame:

- **2003 Larry Gura**
- **2004 Pam Gant**

## **SPOTLIGHT ON EAST ALUMNI:**

Kathryn Koesling Bennett '74 – Wardrobe supervisor for nationally touring musicals such as Broadway's smash hits of *Miss Saigon*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Showboat*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Les Miserables* and *Cats*, as well as for motion pictures such as *Rudy*, *Only the Lonely*, and *Home Alone*. Her resume also includes costume design having created the costumes for the Chicago City Ballet and later Ballet Chicago. In 1994, she was offered the opportunity of wardrobe designer for the television show, "The Untouchables." Kathryn is a card-carrying member of Theatrical Wardrobe Union, Local 769.

**Jeff Boyle '83** – While at East, Jeff starred in several musicals and also found time to play with the "Middle Earth Band." Growing up, Jeff listened to a wide range of musical styles. He is a self-taught multi-instrumentalist who began his professional career as a club drummer/singer in the 1980s playing with Chicago's All Night Newsboys. With a partner, Jeff has launched a successful career writing commercial jingles for clients such as McDonald's, Sears, Coors, Miller Lite, Disney, Six Flags, United Airlines, American Airlines, Toyota, and Boeing, to name just a few. To date, they have written over 1,000 commercial music tracks. As a songwriter, Jeff's albums are filled with fiery performances and melodies from a great cast of musicians. Jeff has an extensive discography and his latest offering recorded in 2008 on Tweak Records is titled "Downtown."

**Lionel Ritchie '67** – A star tennis player at East, Lionel accepted a tennis scholarship at Tuskegee Institute and later graduated from Tuskegee with a major in Economics. In 1968, while a student at Tuskegee, he joined the singing group, The Commodores, as lead singer and saxophonist. While with the Commodores, he penned the ballads "Easy," "Sail On," and "Three Times A Lady." After spending a decade with the band, Lionel left and became an even greater success as a solo artist hitting the #1 on pop charts with "Hello," "All Night Long," and "Say You, Say Me." Lionel is an Academy Award and Grammy award-winning singer, songwriter, instrumentalist, record producer and occasional actor who has sold more than 100 million records. Lionel returned to JT East in 1981 to perform for students during two special assemblies.

**DeBorah Sharpe '70** – DeBorah's first vocal music training came from Mount Olive Baptist Church where she participated in the church choir. Music was part of her life throughout her school career. Following her graduation from East, she joined the Christian singing group, The Sparrows, touring with them for a year. In the mid-1970s, she toured with the Supremes. In 1978, she was the lead understudy of Dorothy in "The Wiz," for the national touring company. She toured with Harry Belafonte in 1983 and again in 1989. These two tours took her all over the world. In addition, DeBorah is an accomplished actress and has played guest roles on the television shows, "The Bill Cosby Show and Beverly Hills 90210.

**Susan Pierson Sonderby '65** – Susan was active in high school participating in student council, modern dance and Red Cross and was a member of the homecoming court. She knew early on that she wanted to go to law school following graduation. Susan accomplished her goal of becoming an attorney. Today she has a very successful career as the Chief Bankruptcy Judge of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, Northern Illinois District.

- **Lawrence (Larry) M. Walsh '66** – Larry is in his second term as Will County Executive. He is responsible for the day-to-day operations of all county departments and also presides over the Will County Board meetings. Besides serving as the County Executive, Larry has a long and distinguished career in public service. In 1970, he served as a member of the Elwood School Board and three years later was elected as Jackson Township Supervisor, a position he held until 2004. Concurrently, he also served as Illinois State Senator for the 43<sup>rd</sup> District from April of 1997 until January of 2005 at which time he was sworn in as the Will County Executive.
- **Keith White '73** – Keith was frequently seen on the East stage in many of the musical productions as well as for his participation in East's premiere singing group known throughout the Chicagoland area as Kolage. His interest in the performing arts and, in particular, his love of theater soon established Keith in a very successful career as a vocalist, dancer, and actor. Today, Keith is Chair and Director of the Theater Department at Lewis University.

*Special mention: In memory of David Stukel 1954-1968*  
(From the JT East yearbook 1968-1969)

For just a moment we knew you –  
Or at least we said we did.  
We read the same books  
played the same games,  
thought the same thoughts,  
and shared the same goals.  
But at what point did friendship begin?  
How were we to know,  
when you said goodbye,  
That tomorrow would never come.

### **One final note....**

In 1983, Joliet East's last graduating class walked the halls for the final time. Who would think that a school could disappear after being part of a community for 19 years. Time marches on without asking permission and we must eventually accept what changes it brings one's way. And nostalgia is an interesting thing because one only tends to remember the good parts. Life gives us brief moments with others...but sometimes in those brief moments, we get memories that last a lifetime.