

Regarding His Character

26 April 2004

*Installation Ceremonies for
Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz
as RIT Vice President and Dean for NTID*

Remarks by: James J. DeCaro

Once upon a time in the Midwest, some half century ago, there was a newspaper carrier who was deaf. This youngster was so successful, and such an inspiration, that the *Sunday Journal* decided to do a full story about him, including photos. He was interviewed by a reporter from the paper and had his picture taken with one of his 90 customers by a staff photographer.

The evening before the article was to appear in the paper, our news carrier was at home studying—as usual. His parents, who also were deaf, were off to bed when someone unexpectedly appeared at the kitchen door. It was a family friend (deaf) who was a ‘linotype setter’ at the *Journal*. The friend had seen the article and the headline that accompanied it, and decided to come to the house. He told our carrier that an article about him would appear the next day; our carrier nodded that he knew this and said he couldn’t wait to see how it turned out. He was stunned, however, when the family friend relayed that the headline would read, “Deaf Mute Carrier Boy Has Perfect Record.”

Our carrier got dressed in some of his finest, grabbed the family dictionary, and set out for the newspaper headquarters to find the night editor. Finding the gentleman, he explained that the headline was demeaning, and proceeded to expound on the implications of using the term “deaf mute.” He pointed out in the dictionary that “mute” meant unable to speak, and that he certainly had a “voice,” which he was demonstrating quite clearly at the time. The night editor apologized profusely and said, “Yes, yes, I see. I will change the headline to read, “Deaf and Dumb Carrier Boy Has Perfect Record.”

Frustrated but undaunted, our carrier patiently opened the dictionary once again and pointed to the word “dumb,” which could be defined as “unable to speak” or alternately in the vernacular as “stupid.” Upon seeing this, the night editor said, “OK, I really do understand. I will take care of this and develop an appropriate headline.”

The next morning when the newspapers arrived for delivery, our carrier nervously opened the morning edition to his story and was greeted by the headline, “*Journal* Carrier Boy Not Bothered by Handicap, Has Perfect Record.” (*Sioux City Sunday Journal*, 23 February 1958)

This story provides an indication of the tenacity, the boldness and the diplomacy of that young news carrier; a 15 year-old youngster who stood alone that evening and made himself “heard” quite clearly. This story also provides significant insight into the content of the character of my long-time friend and our new vice president and dean, T. Alan Hurwitz, who was that news carrier.