

Something didn't feel right to Dick Considine as he neared completion of an electrical engineering degree from Notre Dame in 1960. He enjoyed math and science, he was in a promising field and more than capable of doing the work.

Yet Considine felt a tug pulling him in another direction. Before he finished his senior year, he pulled up stakes, transferring to Eastern Illinois University just 10 miles from where Considine was raised in Mattoon, IL. In a little more than a year he completed necessary credits in the teacher education program.

Putting words to the reason for the switch isn't easy. "I just felt engineering was not for me," Considine said.

The decision worked out well. Fifty-four years later, Considine remains a fixture at the Mattoon Middle School.

"That probably was the best decision I ever made was to go into education," Considine said as the 2015 school year concluded the end of May.

Considine was a full time faculty member first at Mattoon's Central Junior High beginning in 1962. When Mattoon switched from two junior high schools to one in 1977, Considine moved to the South Ninth Street facility that houses what now is called Mattoon Middle School. He retired in 1999. For the past 16 years, Considine's continued as a substitute teacher, all but one day at the middle school level.

Unlike some who say the middle school age is the most challenging, Considine finds it's the only place he wants to work. He discovered in one day subbing at the grade school level he doesn't care for having the same class all day long. And he's never felt temptation to work at the high school.

"I like the kids (at the middle school age)," Considine said. "This is a great place to teach. A lot of people say it's a tough age because the kids are going through puberty and some rebel. I never had a problem with it. To me, I enjoy them.

"Sometimes when a teacher is having a problem I tell them wait until you see them (students) when they are a junior or senior in high school. You'll say these are not the same kids I had (in middle school). And they won't be. I enjoy seeing that. That to me is a plus."

Considine said he uses the decision he made in college as an example to the middle school students as he encourages them to keep options open.

"I tell these kids 'you never know what you're going to end up doing,' " Considine said.

Or how long you might stay. It isn't clear if Considine's tenure ranks at the top for longevity, though clearly he's in an elite group. State Board of Education spokesman Tim Murphy said in 2014 there were 299 certified teachers in Illinois age 70 or more who registered their teaching certificate. A local regional education office spokesperson said some retired teachers continue to register their certificate even if they aren't an active sub.

Considine, now age 77, doesn't say when he'll stop. He takes time now to do the things he wants, like go to Arizona to enjoy the Chicago Cubs spring training. When he's not watching spring baseball, he intends to stay active.

"I just enjoy it," Considine said of his continuing service. "What am I going to do, sit at home every day? I have the education, I might as well use it."

"The rewarding part is seeing the students you had, the success they have later in life," Considine said.

Also rewarding is the association with colleagues. Some who Considine taught with full time are still on the middle school faculty. Seeing and interacting with other faculty is part of what keeps him coming back each year.

In the early years as a substitute, Considine accepted long-term assignments to cover maternity leaves and related extended absences. Now he just goes day by day. He can be choosy about assignments he accepts, preferring the math and science subjects that he taught when he was full time, and history, which also captures his interest.

Considine concedes he hasn't kept up with technology uses in the classroom. As he talks about the changes, a colleague enters the room and smiles as he acknowledges her presence and says, "they set it up for me," when asks how he handles smartboard and other modern technological tools.

"Electronics has changed things immensely," he said. "It used to be you just had a chalkboard. You had to erase what you had for the next class, then write the same thing down again (when explaining a concept)."

While he's not one to set up the modern technology, he accepts and endorses the progress.

He's seen many other changes, too, in school and society. At one point in his career, corporal punishment (padding) was accepted practice. Now it's not.

Early in his career, when you called a parent, you knew who you would be talking with. Increasingly, now families are now split. Unlike some who yearn for the good ole days, Considine said you work with the times, whatever they are, and make adjustments accordingly.

One thing Considine gained with his switch to the education field was a return to his East Central Illinois roots. Born in Chicago, he was raised in Mattoon since age 2 by his mother and grandparents after his father died in an automobile accident. In the summer of 1960, the year he would have graduated from college, he married Regina, who he met in grade school as a girl who lived next door in Mattoon. They dated through high school and college – she was at EIU while he at Notre Dame -- a relationship that continues today as they enjoy trying to keep up with family that includes nine grandchildren.

Then and now, family and education play lead roles for Considine. His mother made possible a Catholic grade school education in Mattoon, a residential Catholic high school education at Chaminade in St. Louis and then Notre Dame. "I still have friends from both places," Considine said of Chaminade and Notre Dame, noting he was fortunate to receive an excellent education.

The Considine's are parents of four children: Tracie, Michael, Chris and Jamie. That led to nine grandchildren (Rachelle, Bobby and Kevin Blume, Kasey, Courtney and Camdyn Considine, and Nicholas,

Derek and T.J. Owens), who occupy a significant amount of time for Considine to keep up with all their activities. "We're proud of them all."

One other item that played a big part of Considine's career is his interest in athletics. In the mid-1960s, Considine began coaching track at Central Junior High. A few years later he was asked to coach boys' basketball, which he did until his retirement, finishing with more than 400 victories.

Considine said he didn't have formal training in coaching. He was asked by the principal to consider coaching, which he was happy to do and enjoyed. He said Frank Jarvis, who was a ninth grade teacher, was someone he watched and followed in the early days. Considine said he was not inclined to shop around for a different coaching or teaching position at the high school level, or to move for an opportunity in another district. His family was settled here, he enjoyed the work, and found it challenging and fulfilling.

Considine also was part of a high school football officiating crew that was active for more than 20 years. The crew of Bob Avery, Considine, John Swick, Bob McDowell and Dan Holly officiated throughout Central Illinois. "I enjoyed that a lot," he said. "We went all over, and we had some great games."