

# Arlington Admiral

## Witness to History<sup>1</sup>

*By James F. Almand with Clare Almand*

“Stop right where you are. Put up your hands. And stop whistling, you dope.”

“Are you a burglar?” she asked.

“Who do you think I am, your fairy godmother? Turn around!”

It’s funny what sticks in your memory. That was the opening line to a one-act play performed in the Swanson Junior High School auditorium in 1963. It was a comedy entitled *Nobody Sleeps*, about a burglar who gets no respect from those in the home he is robbing—I was the burglar. It was my first foray into acting, and, thankfully, my last.

Swanson was named for Admiral Claude A. Swanson, whose accomplishments include serving in both the Senate and House of

*Fig. 1: Swanson Middle School, 1961.*



Representatives, as Governor of Virginia, and six years as the Secretary of the Navy. The school opened in 1940 as Claude A. Swanson Junior High School for grades seven, eight, and nine on the same plot of land where it stands today (Fig. 1). I started seventh grade just twenty-one years later in 1961.

I have many fond memories of Swanson: the school and its traditions, the excellent teaching and support staff, its fine administrators, and my classmates. It's not a wonder that so many of them have remained in the county. Highlights from my time as a student include a paper I still have entitled "My First Day of School," written for my English and Social Studies teacher, Mrs. Kackley, dated October 16, 1961. Her red corrective markings were almost longer than my paper.

Despite that assignment, I became such a good student that when an opportunity to take a summer trip to Europe came up a couple years later through St. Stephen's School, where Mrs. Kackley's husband taught, Mrs. Kackley recommended me to fill the last spot (Fig. 2).

Mr. George Long was another of my English teachers. A believer in the basics of English grammar and a perplexing sense of humor, he stunned our class one day by passing out a test made up entirely

of questions which seemed to have no answer. For example: "How far can a dog run into the woods?" When you know the answer, it doesn't seem so difficult—a dog can only run *into* the woods halfway before he is running *out* of the woods! The test was his joke, and we all had a good laugh.

On a sadder note, I will never forget being in Mr. Martin's Health class when Principal

*Fig. 2: Jim Almand (front left), and St. Stephen students getting ready to fly to Europe, July 1963.*



Courtesy of Jim Almand.

Wolfe announced over the PA system that President Kennedy had been shot. Fortunately, most of my memories are much more pleasant.

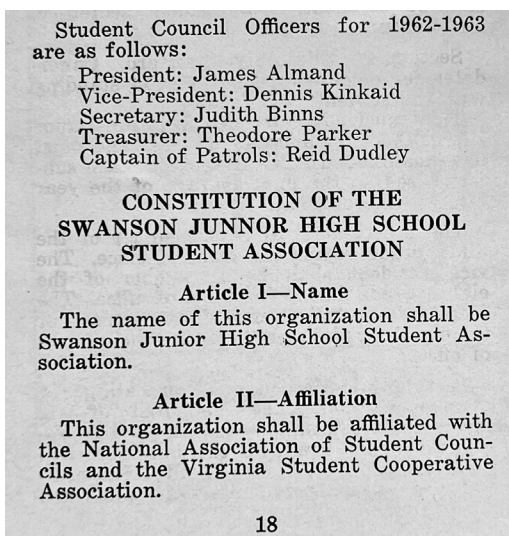
Always interested in student government, I was elected President of my seventh and eighth grade classes. For my last year, ninth grade, I was elected President of the Student Council (Fig. 3). My campaign slogan was “All the Way with JFA,” which was a play on John F. Kennedy’s campaign slogan, “All the Way with JFK.” It worked!

My campaign manager at that time was the future former Congressman Tom Davis, who also served on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors as Chairman. Tom had recently transferred to Swanson but was so personable that I knew he would make a great campaign manager for me. In that election, I beat my longtime friend, Mac Estabrook, who later became a prominent attorney and still lives in Arlington.

Another highlight that occurred during my junior high graduation was the presentation of the DAR Good Citizenship Medal, which was awarded to one boy and one girl in the class. I was awarded the medal for displaying honor, service, courage, leadership, and patriotism. I believe all of those qualities were nurtured or instilled in me during my time at Swanson.

The Student Council provided me with incredible leadership experience that I still value today. It gave me the courage to run for student government positions at W-L High School. In tenth grade, Mac Estabrook and I ran against each other for class president. Unfortunately, we split the Swanson vote and Bob Jack from Kenmore won the election!

*Fig. 3: Swanson Student Council Program, 1963–1964.*

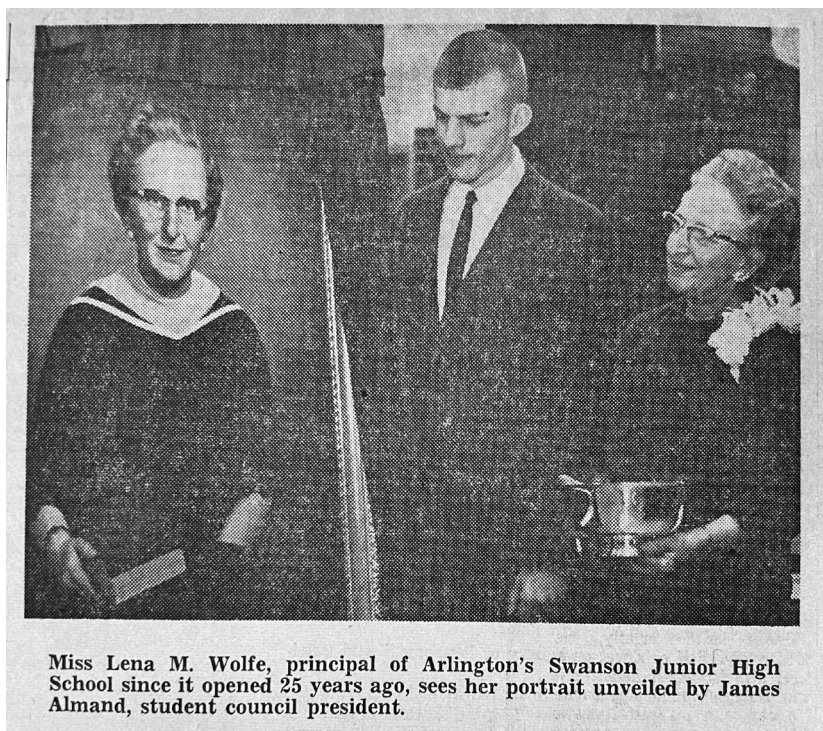


My sophomore year at W-L was also Swanson's twenty-fifth anniversary. I was honored to have been asked to unveil the portrait of the only principal Swanson had had in its first twenty-five years, Miss Lena M. Wolfe (Fig. 4). At that time, I said, "Her own pride, which is not a self-conscious pride, but a pride in school, staff, students, and community, has ultimately been responsible not only for Swanson's traditions, but also for its progress."

As a graduate who also remained in the area as a legislator representing Arlington in the House of Delegates and then later as a judge in the Arlington Circuit Court, I was also invited to speak at the fiftieth and seventy-fifth Swanson Middle School anniversary celebrations.

Another reason that Swanson holds a special place in my heart is because it was the only Arlington public school I attended that my three children also attended. I relished any chance to return, not just

*Fig. 4: Evening Star article about Swanson's  
25th Anniversary, February 15, 1965.*



Courtesy of Jim Almand.



to honor the school that encouraged my leadership aspirations, but to share my knowledge and champion education. For example, I returned multiple times to participate in Career Day for each of my children, to share with their classes about life as a member of the Virginia General Assembly. I was especially honored to return in 1998, when my eldest son was an eighth grader, to watch Governor James Gilmore sign one of my education bills into law. And in 2009, I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to return as a judge for a mock trial, where I presided over the compelling case *The Commonwealth vs. Sticky Fingers*.

While over the years there have been some changes, Swanson's spirit, tradition, and history have been maintained, and the Swanson of today has risen to the challenges of a diverse population and a dramatic increase in the subject matter young people must know in our current world. Swanson, having won many awards and accolades, still has an outstanding principal and administration, a dedicated and hard-working teaching staff, and a caring and engaged student body excited about learning. I feel so fortunate that my children all became Swanson Admirals and received the same excellent education that I was fortunate to have had and which has been so important in helping us throughout our lives to be better citizens.

*To Swanson alma mater to thee our praises sing.  
In heart and mind forever, our memories ever cling.  
Our loyalty undying—we pledge forevermore.  
May years bring all that's good and true—  
Claude Swanson to you.*

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### **About the Authors**

Delegate James F. Almand represented Arlington in the Virginia General Assembly from 1978 to 2003. He received his undergraduate and law degrees from The College of William and Mary and served as an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney in Arlington prior to his election in 1977. On August 1, 2003, he was appointed to the Circuit Court for Arlington and Falls Church by Governor Mark Warner to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Paul Sheridan. He was subsequently elected by the Virginia Legislature to an 8-year term and retired from the bench in 2011. He and his wife, Cindy

Flood Almand, live in Arlington. They have three children and four grandchildren.

Clare Almand was born and raised in Arlington, Virginia. She received a BA in Media Arts and Design from James Madison University in 2009. Clare's essays have appeared in *NY Times's Modern Love*, *LA Times*, and *HuffPost*. In TV, she has written for lifestyle programs that include *This Is LA*, *Destination: LA*, and *Staycation!* She has also worked various production roles on projects that include TNT's *Major Crimes*, Syfy's *Sharknado 3*, and Searchlight Pictures' *Suncoast*. Clare teaches personal essay writing at the Writing Pad school in Los Angeles.

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### Endnotes

1. The Admirals are the mascot of Swanson Middle School.