

# Shannon's success inspirational at GHS

## Former teacher motivated his students with example of father of Information Theory

By PETER COMINGS  
Staff Writer

**GAYLORD** — The browning, faded newspapers and mimeograph sheets documenting the lives of Dr. Claude Shannon and Dr. Arthur Compton fold carefully under the fingers of former Gaylord science and math teacher Don Tarbuton. For 37 years, the inspirational reading material on Gaylord's two Nobel prize winners hung on a 4-foot-by-6-foot bulletin board in his classroom.

Though he was not responsible for it, the placing of Dr. Shannon's bust in Gaylord's downtown park fit perfectly with Tarbuton's goal to inspire others to reach the same heights. Tarbuton fed that inspiration to almost 8,000 students with chalk dust by the spoonful.

"People don't know the history of this town that shaped the world," said Tarbuton, himself not a Gaylord native.

Tarbuton launches easily into that history. Shannon's work on his capacity formula which describes computer memory, Compton's fateful meeting with Dr. Oppenheimer at Onsego Lake State Park to discuss further testing of the atomic bomb. Their actions drove Tarbuton to pursue his master's degree in physics and mathematics.

**HE DROVE IT INTO** his charges.

"Look around you. You can see. You can feel it. It is pride. I have always stressed pride in our school systems," he said. "In 1958 while teaching physics, chemistry and mathematics at Gaylord, it was brought to my attention that Dr. Shannon graduated from Gaylord High School. I immediately began to gather information so I could pass it on to the math and science students."

Tarbuton started each school year mentioning the students' predecessors. "I always ended it with, 'He was from Gaylord High School. If he did it, you can do it.'"

Many of his students have succeeded: Dr. Brooks Madsen, chemistry; Harry Lange, mathematics, investor; Dr. Nancy Elgas, biology research; Dr. Jimmy Madagame, medical, and Dr. Harry Glidden, chemistry, just to name a few.

"I used to stay after school with him until 7 or 8 in the evening," Tarbuton said of Glidden, often not even understanding what he was doing. "He went on to get his doctorate. Right now he's one of the leaders in the country in plastics."

Dr. Madagame, now living in Chicago, still calls Tarbuton.

**"HE CALLS ME** once in a while to go out and have a steak dinner with him," he said, then remembers back to the days he had him as a student, an athlete who never neglected his studies staying up until 3 a.m. to finish homework. "We had to figure out ways to get him from studying so much."

"In our own community there are doctors, lawyers, city police officers, state police, members of the sheriff's department, coaches, teachers, servicemen, nurses, business people, engineers, veterinarians ... All of these students were introduced to Dr. Shannon

in my classes."

Tarbuton got the chance to meet his idol in 1986 when Dr. Shannon returned to Gaylord High School looking for nothing more than his 1932 graduation picture. It was an exercise in humility.

"(He) left the school somewhat disappointed and upset and would fly out the next day," said Tarbuton. Tarbuton convinced Dr. Shannon to return to the high school the next day to be inducted as an honorary member into the high school National Honor Society. Literally pinning him outside, Tarbuton encouraged him to visit his classroom where the graduation picture hung. That led to an introduction to the math teaching staff and finally a brief speech given at graduation.

**"AFTER MEETING** Dr. Shannon I tried over the years to have a bust and plaque placed in the high school in his honor," Tarbuton related. "I was never successful. Not being able to be sure that a memory of Dr. Shannon would remain in our school was and continues to be a sad memory for me."

He remains pleased with the park and the statue downtown. Tarbuton's work with his students recalls another trick he used to spread Dr. Shannon's fame. Math and science movies the school used to rent occasionally featured Shannon. Before Tarbuton returned them, know-

ing they would circulate among other northern Michigan schools, he dropped a note into them reminding the next viewer where the star of the film was from.

**DR. SHANNON FACTS:**

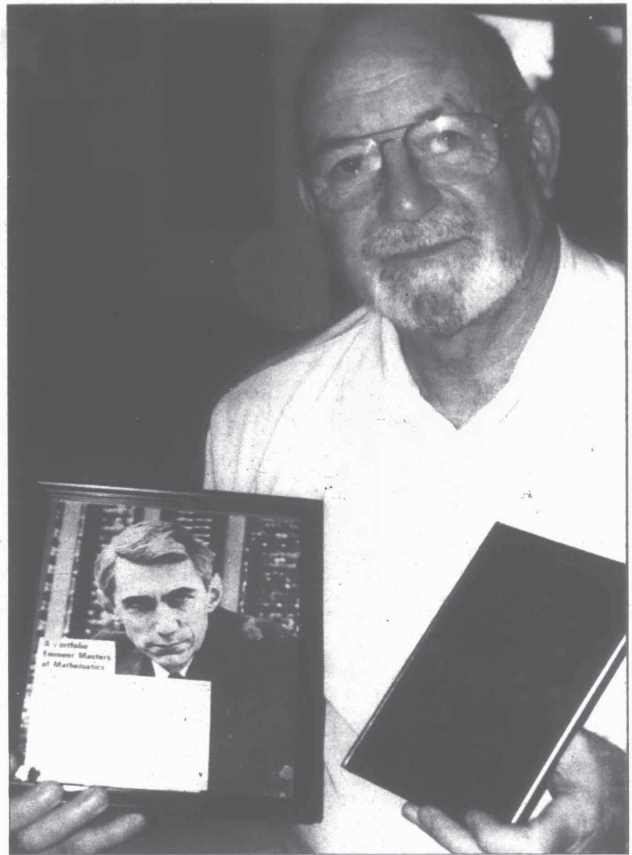
- Claude Elwood Shannon was born April 30, 1916 in Petoskey. His childhood hero was Thomas Edison. He got his first job with Western Union as a messenger boy.

- Shannon earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan in 1936; his master's and his Ph.D. from MIT in 1940.
- Favorite author, T.S. Elliot; favorite food, vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce

- Among his awards are the National Medal of Science from President Johnson; recognition by Life magazine as the master of mathematics

- Inventor of the "Information Theory," the basis for the design and study of telephone and computer systems. His master's thesis has been called "possibly the most important master's thesis of the century."

- In 1985 Dr. Shannon made an unexpected appearance at the International Information Theory Symposium in Brighton, England. The chairman said of him, "It was as if Newton showed up at a physics conference." Tarbuton reported, "He took out three balls and started to juggle. He amazed the audience with his humor."



Claude Shannon's photo was part of an annual display in Don Tarbuton's GHS classroom.

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