

## State names day for Maas

By [Dylan Belden](#) , *Albert Lea Tribune*

A former Albert Lea coach, teacher, recreation director and mentor to many got a surprise last week: a day in his honor.

LeRoy Maas and his wife, Lillian, went to a banquet at the Elks Club Friday thinking they were going to recognize donors to the LeRoy Maas Scholarship Fund. But during the celebration, Manny Stiel, one of the trustees of the foundation, presented them with a framed proclamation signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty declaring Sept. 26 LeRoy and Lillian Maas Day in Minnesota.

"All this for an old guy like me is kind of overwhelming," said Maas, 86.

"I'm just Joe Blow down the street," he said.

But Pete Veldman, a former pupil and trustee of the fund, said Maas had an extraordinary affect on many young people.

"I was a little farm kid from Hollandale, and he was the first teacher who made a real impression on me," Veldman said. Maas coached Veldman in football, track and wrestling; Veldman went on to be a state wrestling champion.

"What he did for kids who were from broken homes, or one of their parents was deceased, he was really a father figure for many of those kids," he said.

Along with other former Maas students, Veldman helped create the scholarship fund in 1996. Since then, the foundation has granted scholarships to 15 Albert Lea wrestling students.

Veldman said the group wanted to do something special for Maas this year, and decided to pursue the proclamation from the governor. Manny Stiel did most of the leg work, Veldman said.

"Those things are not easy to get through," Veldman said. "They normally don't do that for any person. You have to know Manny Stiel to know how persuasive he is."

It probably didn't hurt that Pawlenty was Veldman's student at South St. Paul High School, where Veldman taught and coached for years.

When Stiel gave him the proclamation, Maas said he was astounded. "It's amazing, these kids," he said.

Fitting his role as a father figure, Maas still uses the word "kids" when talking about Veldman and his other former students.

"I'm going to be 70 in a couple of days," Veldman said with a laugh.

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