



## Isabel Sem: At the Root of Frisco's Education System

By Suzanne L. Feinberg

**WHILE SIPPING ICED TEA** on a recent summer morning, Isabel Sem recalled how Frisco has changed over the last three decades. She believes Frisco's deep roots have helped the city grow the way it has. You don't have to dig very deep to find Isabel Sem embedded in those roots, quietly nurturing Frisco's growth.

A long-time influential figure in Frisco, Mrs. Sem has worn many hats in her quest to shape the community, from school-crossing guard and classroom volunteer, to the first female school

board member. Mrs. Sem embodies what every growing community needs: a selfless crusader who has the people's best interest at heart.

"I have really enjoyed being part of decisions that have impacted the growth of Frisco," she says.

Upon moving to Frisco in 1974, she began building a network of other young mothers. Soon they formed a chapter of Young Homemakers and became involved in the local schools, which was a priority for Mrs. Sem because of her two school-aged sons.

The Young Homemakers decided a woman needed to hold a spot on the Frisco school board and they persuaded Mrs. Sem to run. Her campaign was a family affair, as Mrs. Sem's late husband, Harold, hand-painted wooden yard signs to promote his favorite candidate. After an unsuccessful bid the first time, Mrs. Sem was elected by a mere two votes in 1977.

While the board focused on managing the fledgling school system's finances and building maintenance, Mrs. Sem's approach was more personal. Her position allowed her to provide a much-needed voice for teachers, as she helped obtain the resources they needed to succeed.

"The focus should always be on the teachers and what is going on in the classroom. That's the most important thing," says Mrs. Sem. Although Mrs. Sem was not a teacher, her mother was and instilled in her and her siblings the importance of education.

During her tenure, which spanned several non-consecutive terms over nine years, Mrs. Sem was involved in the search for two superintendents: Dr. Justin Wakeland and Dr. Rick Reedy.

Mrs. Sem recalls she was shocked and rendered speechless when she learned the Frisco school board decided to name a school in her honor in 2006. After all, she was a member of the school naming committee and knew that schools traditionally had been named after

Isabel Sem (left) photo by Chris Fritchie  
 1977 School Board (right)  
 back row: Dale Smith, Bill Minter,  
 Billy Gene Phillips;  
 front row: Doug Williams, Isabel  
 Sem, J.W. Newman, Joe Wade  
 photo provided by Isabel Sem



deceased educators.

"There are no words to describe what it's like to go into the school and see your name everywhere," says Mrs. Sem, who has become somewhat of a

local icon, as students recognize her around town and approach her to receive her trademark hug.

Though not one to boast about her celebrity status, she does enjoy showing friends around the school and getting to know the students and teachers.

She'll remain involved, "as long they'll let me. I do say 'no' occasionally," says Mrs. Sem, but she admits it is a word not often found in her vocabulary.

In addition to her work on the school board, Mrs. Sem served as manager of Kathy Seei's Frisco mayoral campaign and recent bid for Congress. She is a founding board member of the Frisco Education Foundation, a board member of the Frisco Heritage Association and a volunteer at her church.

"One person really can make a difference, but they need help doing that," she says, adding that her supportive husband, sons and network of friends have made it possible for her to achieve so much over the years.

The Frisco of today is a far cry from the few thousand residents and handful of Main Street stores Mrs. Sem and her family found when they settled here 30 years ago. Mrs. Sem, however, likes what she sees and enjoys being a part of Frisco's development, although she admits she does miss the sight of farmers working their endless rows of maize fields.

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