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Included below is a press release regarding the grand marshals for Ferris State University's Homecoming parade. Further information is available by contacting Leah Nixon, assistant director of News Services.

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John and Sally Whalen named Grand Marshals for 2007 Homecoming parade

BIG RAPIDS – For many, homecoming week at Ferris is an opportunity to visit their old college stomping grounds for a weekend of football, parades and reminiscing. For Sally and John Whalen of Canadian Lakes, it's the opportunity to continue supporting and participating in the place they call home, as they serve as Grand Marshals for the 2007 Homecoming parade.

"It's a huge honor to be asked to Grand Marshal," said Sally. "John and I have always been connected with Ferris. We even went to their football games before we went to college there."

Both John and Sally attended Ferris Institute from 1951-1954. John played Bulldog football for three years, playing in three Homecoming games. In 1952, he served as president of the team and was voted Most Valuable Player.

Having been born and raised in Big Rapids, and being Ferris alumni, wasn't the only reason John and Sally came to know and love the Homecoming tradition. Sally's father, Carl Rex, played football at Ferris in the 1920s, playing in the first Homecoming game which his fraternity, Gamma Phi Sigma (later Phi Sigma Chi), sponsored – the same fraternity John joined decades later.

Not only has their family been a part of the homecoming tradition but also in keeping Ferris open during the Great Depression. "I recently read about a group of 39 business men who pledged \$1,000 to keep Ferris running in 1931," said Sally. "As I read the list of names, I came across Dr. Donald MacIntyre, my grandfather."

With such deep roots in the history of Ferris, leaving Big Rapids didn't interfere with the Whalen's faithful support and love for the school. Avid supporters of Bulldog sports, they can be seen in the stands cheering on sports teams such as football, volleyball, hockey, basketball and track. They have even followed football playoffs, travelling to New Haven, Conn., and Florence, Ala.

"We love to go to the football games," Sally said. "We have been to every home game this season."

Aside from athletics, the Whalens are members of the Ferris State University President's Club and the Society of Golden Eagles. John also serves on the board of the Ferris Gridiron Club. According to Sally, they feel they owe Ferris their dedication and support in return for their educations.

Married 54 years, the Whalens have traveled the world. When they married, John was in the Army, taking them to Texas, Germany and Lansing. But missing the small town life, they returned and have resided in Canadian Lakes for the past 18 years.

"The school is like a small town, that's why we love it," said Sally, "Everyone is friendly and knows everyone. And the history is part of us. These buildings are named for people we know, which is something current students probably don't even think about."

The Whalens have four children and six grandchildren. Two of their children and their grand nephew have also attended Ferris.

According to Jeremy Mishler, director of Alumni Relations and Advancement Operations, every year alumni and friends are selected for the honor of Grand Marshal by the student homecoming committee in conjunction with the office of University Advancement and Marketing. The Whalen's undeniable support for Ferris students and staff over several decades made them more than deserving as Grand Marshals in a tradition their family helped found and uphold, he added.

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