



# PETER JOHANSEN

Legend of Modesto

By Claudia Newcorn

---

**“Peter is someone who is bigger than life”**

— Modesto City Council Member Brad Hawn

---

It's natural to assume that with a Modesto high school named after him, Peter Johansen must have been a school principal at some point in his career. In fact, he wasn't an educator in the conventional sense at all. It has been his decades-long efforts on behalf of education as well as his extensive community service that earned him the honor.

“Peter is someone who is bigger than life,” said Modesto City Council Member Brad Hawn. “He is a regular guy who decided to make a difference not only in his own life, but to help others excel beyond where they could have. I am an example of that...a 30-minute meeting and a few contacts over the years, and here I am in public service.”



### **Rooted in the Community**

Except for a stint in the military and working in San Francisco, Johansen has lived in Stanislaus County most of his life, moving here with his parents from Humboldt County at age seven months. The oldest of five children, he has two sons, a daughter and three grandchildren.

He graduated from Turlock High School, attended Modesto Junior College, and then earned his bachelor's degree from the University California – Berkeley, majoring in business. "I did an internship at the San Francisco Emporium, and the UC professors came there to teach classes. When I took a course in interior decorating, I worked in the drapery department. It was hybrid learning – something we need more of now."

In Modesto, Johansen established the House of Carpets. It would serve as a springboard into his community service career. Part of that encompassed involvement with the town's growing business environment. "I was very active in the community, the Merchants' Association, and the Chamber of Commerce. My partner and I founded the local Better Business Bureau in 1951." He was also active coaching basketball and baseball for kids.

Johansen became involved in the late 1960s in Christian ministry, serving as a volunteer for the Campus Crusade for nearly 20 years. He traveled all over the world, speaking on Christian principles to people in such places as New Zealand, Japan and Taiwan. "They paid for airfare, but there was no salary," Johansen smiles. Helping people *continued: PAGE 8*

continued: Peter Johansen... had become an integral part of his life, and in 1970 he sold House of Carpets. "I was called to be a pastor at the First Baptist Church at 12th and M streets, with which I had been involved for many years."

### Education A Priority

From the beginning, he was interested in education, recognizing its importance to individuals and the community. "I made it a practice that every time a new superintendent of schools or new president of MJC came in, I would try to get together with them in the first month or so, and let them know that because I believed education to be one of community's highest priorities, I would always be available to help. Both the school district and MJC called on me many times over a period of 50 years to be involved in things."

City Schools and Sylvan School District and it spread out to the whole county."

In 1988, Johansen helped form the Stanislaus County Literacy group. "I was able to teach a number of men 30-40 years of age how to read. My wife still does that." He also founded the area branch of the Parent Institute for Quality Education, a nine-week program that teaches parents at every public school in Stanislaus County and gets them involved with their children's education.

"I voluntarily worked on behalf of education and to this day I feel education is a top priority in our community," Johansen emphasizes. "I also think education needs to be lifted up to a more important priority in our country. One of my concerns is that the ethics and morals of the US

---

## "Take an interest in others. Take an interest in your community."

— Peter Johansen

---

Between 1957 and 1967, he became active in city government and was Mayor of Modesto. During this time, he was heavily involved with volunteer work in education. "In the 1960s there was a school bond that was defeated three times in two and a half years. In 1968, they asked me to head up the school bond and it passed by 71%. I was able to enlist good workers in the community and business people and raise money to pay for the campaign. Then I was asked to head up an override tax for education only, and we were able to pass that bond in which the citizens of the Modesto School District passed an added tax for 20 years for education."

But his educational outreach efforts didn't end there. He helped to found Stanislaus Partners In Education, a program still very much active today. "We enlisted people from businesses, industry and churches to work as mentors and tutors at schools. We first started in the Modesto

have been on a downhill slide, which affects kids. Young people should be getting a top education - but they're involved in other issues."

### Leaving a Mark

Johansen has left his influence on a lot of people. "Peter sets a high standard for integrity, hard work and servanthood," explains Hawn. "He has made a great impact on his own merits, but I believe his real contribution has been to be the one who encourages others to the same standard and (this) multiplies his efforts. He is larger than life, and I have always wanted to emulate his desire to be a good servant to the community."

Johansen credits his success and motivation to a strong sense of faith. "If you really know the Lord personally, you cannot become a pessimist; you're more an optimist, and you have hope to bring about change..."

My faith [has] dictated to me that I needed to have an influence in my community and on people who need help."

In 1992, Peter Johansen High School opened. It serves over 2000 students in grades 9-12. "I was just floored," Johansen admits. "I had worked on behalf of schools and education all of my adult life, and that was just a fact."

His advice to others? "Take an interest in others. Take an interest in your community."

In his almost 90 years of living in Stanislaus County, Johansen has not only seen tremendous change – he has been one of its agents. ■




**Hardwood, laminate, & tile sales & installation.**  
**Hardwood flooring refinishing & repairs.**

Showroom located at  
 823 N. Emerald Ave, Modesto, Ca. 95351  
 Phone (209) 571-8583 [www.astepabovelflooring.com](http://www.astepabovelflooring.com)

10% Chamber Discount  
 \*max value \$500.00




Financing Available

# Why PR?



Because image is everything.

*Carrie Cardoza Bordona: President*

In today's business climate, the image your company projects and the reputation it maintains now will affect its future. Whether you're trying to establish an image, protect an image or maintain a positive image with your target audience, a solid public relations plan is essential.

**cardoza ASSOCIATES, INC.**

- Brand development
- Media relations
- Corporate communications
- Community relations

*Public Relations: a strategic effort to establish and maintain a company's image with its publics through the use of communications tools.*

2020 Standiford Ave., Suite D3  
 Modesto, CA 95350  
 ph 209.521.5464 fx 209.521.1487

[gocardoza.com](http://gocardoza.com)



## Who is steering your vehicle?

**Know your repair rights.** Visit [burnsidebodyshop.com](http://burnsidebodyshop.com) for the Auto Body Repair Consumer Bill of Rights.



If you are in an accident, the Auto Body Repair Consumer Bill of Rights ensures your legal right to choose an auto body shop for necessary repairs. Call Burnside Body Shop for quality, reliable service and expertise.

**AUTO BODY AND COLLISION REPAIR SERVICES**  
 612 N FRANKLIN P.O. BOX 4456 MODESTO, CA 95352 209.521.6570 PH