

Reed City Area Public Schools
Graduate Highlight May 2007

Colonel (Dr.) Michael E. Johnson
RCHS Class of 1975
by Steven Westhoff, Superintendent

This 1975 class Valedictorian from Reed City High School can certainly fly with the eagles. Colonel (Dr.) Michael E. Johnson is commander of the 81st Aerospace Medicine Squadron, 81st Medical Group, Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi Mississippi.

Colonel Johnson's job is a little bit on the complex side. He is responsible for Team Aerospace, including the clinical services of flight medicine, audiology and optometry, food and public facility safety and sanitation, readiness, as well as the occupational and preventative health programs for the 81st Training Wing. The squadron is composed of six flights: flight medicine, bioenvironmental engineering, optometry, public health, audiology and health promotions.

Colonel Johnson shared: "Though we may have lived in many different parts of the country and world, Reed City is still the place I call home.

"High School was huge for me. Greg Weiss had a significant impact on me. He gave me a 'warning letter' in the 11th grade, because I was getting a B+ in his Spanish class. It was kind of an awakening. He was the only person in all of my schooling to that point to have ever expressed an interest in my performance. It was probably because of that letter that I was able to graduate with some distinction. He has become and remains a friend. Another person who changed my life is Bruce L. Barrie – a character with a larger-than-life projection to the students. As a coach, teacher, personality, rebel, he stood out among teachers. It was, in fact, Mr. Barrie who pinned the moniker of "Buzz" upon me. It was at the first freshman football practice we had in the summer of 1971. There were two of us "Mike Johnsons" at practice that day. When in the course of that practice, the confusion between the two of us came to light. It was Coach Barrie who said, pointing to me, 'We can't have this, from this day forward, you will be known as.....Buzz!' I was stunned, instantly traumatized. I didn't realize the lifelong positive impact it would have on me. It was not until much later that I realized what a gift he had given me.

"I had great friends in high school as well. Dave Montgomery, Curt Van Sickle, Steve Morris, Terry Gerber, Keith Kailing, to name a few. I can still recall the laughter at the lunch table as we recall one friend who, while deer hunting, shot his car by mistake.

"The best job I have ever had was right there in Reed City as well. I was lucky enough, thanks to my friend Curt Van Sickle, to land a job at Vic's Supermarket. Colin Hayward, the owner, allowed the staff to learn each and every position in the store if they chose. I was able to work the register, stock shelves, work produce, work in the meat department and, eventually, become one of the night managers. I learned through trial and error leadership lessons that I still use as commander today. I owe Mr. Hayward particularly as well as Artie Robinson, Bob Erler, Bob Pontz, Rita Coaster and Dick Hubble a great debt of gratitude."



Colonel Johnson is a graduate of Ferris State University's College of Optometry in 1983, Squadron Officer School, Maxwell AFB, Alabama in 1989, Air Command and Staff College in 1990 and Air War College in 1997. He has received the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with six oak leaf clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal, Air Force Achievement Medal with one oak leaf cluster, Air Force Recognition Ribbon, 1993 Air Education and Training Command Optometrist of the Year, and 1993 Air Force Optometrist of the year awards.

In summary; Colonel (Dr.) Michael E. Johnson said it best: "The biggest impact on my life has come from my parents, brothers, sister, aunts and uncles and grandparents. Because of them, I still call Reed City home. The vintage of the years of my life in Reed City do make me want to return once my career serving America is over. Who could ask for more than family and great friends?"

Reed City Area Public Schools is indeed proud of Colonel (Dr.) Michael E. Johnson, RCHS class of 1975!