James Arnett Wilson, Marion High School Class of 1937, was a fighter pilot with the pioneering aviation crew the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African-American pilots in the U.S. armed forces. Even more precious to him were the years he spent working with at-risk students on the south side of Chicago, as a high school math teacher and later a college math instructor.

Wilson was one of nine children growing up in a family that placed high value on education. (His grandfather Tucker Wilson had been the first African-American to graduate from DePauw University in 1888, and James and most of his siblings earned advanced college degrees.) He fell in love with flying as a boy in Marion, when a family friend took him and his siblings up in a rudimentary aircraft in the early days of aviation. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, it was undoubtedly that experience with flight that turned him toward Tuskegee and its groundbreaking flight training program for African-Americans.

Before that choice gave him a place of honor in our nation’s history, though, it was a Latin teacher at MHS who paved the way for him to continue his education after high school. Gladys Neal lobbied successfully for a full scholarship for him to attend Earlham College (Richmond). After graduating from Earlham, he went on to Howard University (Washington, D.C.), where he was working toward his master’s degree in mathematics when he signed on with the Army Air Corps and its Tuskegee flight school.

Before 1940, African-Americans were barred from flying for the U.S. armed forces. The Tuskegee Airmen broke that color barrier, and the “Red Tails,” as the Tuskegee pilots became known due to their red-tipped airplanes, became well-respected for their expert skill and dedication in protecting bombers, which they escorted on their runs in World War II.

Wilson graduated from the Tuskegee Institute in 1944 and went on to serve with the 99th Fighter Squadron of the Army Air Corps, stationed primarily in Italy. He recounted years later in a radio interview in Chicago how the Tuskegee pilots challenged stereotypes and preconceptions, remembering that many bomber pilots were shocked to find that the fighter pilots who had so expertly protected them from German Luftwaffe were African-Americans. In a time when such opportunities were scarce for their peers, the Tuskegee Airmen proved without a doubt that it was a gross misconception that minorities lacked the skills and dedication needed for such an endeavor.
Wilson was among about 300 Tuskegee Airmen and widows who represented the thousands of men and women involved in the Tuskegee program as they were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by the U.S. Congress and then-President George W. Bush in a ceremony at the U.S. Capitol.

After the war, Wilson returned to Howard University to finish his master's degree, then pursued doctoral studies at the University of Chicago. He became a math teacher at Chicago's Phillips High School, where he taught for 20 years. Former students and co-workers remembered him as an exceptional teacher who encouraged students to face challenges head-on and without fear.

He went on to teach math at Kennedy-King College in Chicago for 23 years, retiring in 1990 to a 100-acre farm in Michigan. In retirement he volunteered at elementary schools and spent nearly 20 years planting and tending trees on his farm, part of a legacy of reforestation that he held dear. He was also a prolific gardener and shared his harvest with neighbors and friends.

Wilson died at the age of 92 in August 2012, survived by a daughter, Carol Wilson Saffold, and a son, James Wilson Jr., along with four grandchildren. He was also survived by five siblings.
James R. Hodge, Marion High School Class of 1970, is an international finance expert and president of Permal Asset Management, part of the Permal Group, and has left an invaluable legacy that will impact generations of students at Indiana University, where he earned his bachelor's degree. He was a driving force and lead donor for Hodge Hall Undergraduate Center, a $60 million upgrade that will help propel the Kelley School of Business into the future.

Hodge Hall, which was to open to students in 2014, was an expansion that dramatically transformed the school's learning environment for undergraduate students. The new facility added vital classroom space and a student commons; improved technology to allow real-time interaction with business leaders and other students around the globe; a room to host large gatherings and conferences; and a home for the Indiana Business Research Center.

At the naming ceremony in spring 2012, Dan Smith, then dean of the Kelley School, had high praise for Hodge: "Jim, you embody all of the values that we hold dear at the Kelley School. Your story is a story about an amazing work ethic. Our students will learn that success never comes easy and demands focused commitment. Your story is about integrity. Our students will learn that there are no short cuts and that success can be achieved without compromising sound values."

Hodge graduated with highest distinction from the IU Kelley School of Business in 1974. He went on to earn a master's of business administration from Harvard Business School in 1979.

He joined the Permal Group, one of the oldest and largest alternative asset management firms in the world, in 1987. He is now president of Permal Asset Management LLC, and as chairman of its investment committee, he is responsible for asset allocation as well as performance monitoring, research and analysis of fund managers. In addition, he serves as director, alternate director, or member of the advisory board for a number of independent offshore investment funds.

Prior to joining the Permal Group, he spent four years with the New York Stock Exchange, where he held a number of positions culminating in director of cost accounting, and four years as controller of Biolectron Inc., a privately held medical products company. He is a licensed certified public accountant in the state of New Jersey.

Hodge is on the board of directors of the IU Foundation, which oversees fundraising for all IU campuses and manages the university’s endowment of more than $1 billion. He also serves on the Kelley School of
Business Dean’s Council. He is a lifetime member of the IU Alumni Foundation, a member of the IU Foundation President’s Circle, and the 1820 Society. He also has been a frequent guest speaker in Kelley School classes, and has funded an endowed chair at the school.

In 2013, IU and the IU Foundation named him one of their Partners in Philanthropy, presenting him with the Cornerstone Award, which recognizes individuals whose partnership and volunteer involvement have been instrumental in the success of a single IU philanthropic initiative for a campus, program, or school. In that same year, he was named to the IU Kelley School’s Academy of Alumni Fellows.

He is also a member of the advisory council of the National Executive Service Corps of New York, which offers a broad array of consulting services to nonprofit organizations, schools and government agencies.
Dr. David Wright, Marion High School Class of 1973, has played a key leadership role in the growth of Indiana Wesleyan University — which now has nearly 3,000 students on its beautiful residential campus right here in Marion, and nearly 12,500 adult learners at the school’s regional education centers and online degree programs. In July 2013 he became president of the university.

Dr. Wright has experienced a wide range of roles at IWU over the years, beginning with his time as an undergraduate there (when the school, then called Marion College, served about 800 students). After earning his Ph.D. at the University of Kentucky, he served the university as a vice president, provost, and now president. This Marion Giant has played a truly integral role in shaping IWU into what it is today.

As provost and chief academic officer from 2008 to 2013, he played leading roles in the development of the university’s School of Nursing, the Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University, the expansion of the adult and graduate programs, and the ongoing health science initiative. The fruit of his leadership influence can be seen in the recently named Ott Hall of Sciences and Nursing. This modern, state-of-the-art building houses a suite of research labs, offices, classrooms, and laboratories for undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty members.

In various teaching and administrative roles at IWU from 1994 to 2005, Dr. Wright helped shape what is today the College of Adult and Professional Studies, as well as the Graduate School.

As an academic visionary for the College of Adult and Professional Studies, he set the course for the school’s now-robust online learning community. He wrote and piloted IWU’s first online course and created the framework for the development of online degree programs.
As vice president for Adult and Graduate Studies, he went on to help develop and implement several online degree programs, as well as the school’s first out-of-state regional education center. He also played a key role in the development and initiation of IWU’s strategic plan for regional expansion of its education centers, which now include sites in Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Illinois.

In addition to IWU, Dr. Wright has held various teaching and administrative roles at Azusa Pacific University in California; the Wesleyan Bible Institute in Birmingham, England; the University of Kentucky; and the Institut Theologique Wesleyan in Haiti.

Dr. Wright is also an ordained Wesleyan pastor and led churches in Fairmount and Fort Wayne; he also played a leadership role for his home church in Marion. He is also a licensed pilot.

Dr. Wright earned his bachelor’s degree in Christian ministries and biblical studies from Indiana Wesleyan University in 1977; his master’s degree in biblical studies from George Fox University in 1980; and his Ph.D. in educational policy studies and evaluation from the University of Kentucky in 1990.

He and his wife (and fellow IWU graduate), Helen, have two daughters, Christin and Andrea, and three grandchildren.
In Lennon Brown’s four years as principal of Marion High School, the school has undergone an extraordinary transformation, going from the brink of state takeover to a level of success that has earned statewide and even national attention. The work of students, staff, and community members made this turnaround possible, but Brown’s leadership was a key driving force.

His fearlessness in addressing concerns and his compassion and appreciation for the staff cleared the way for tough decisions and decisive action. Under Brown’s guidance, the administration, faculty, and staff united together to tackle the most difficult issues facing educators today with an “all hands on deck” philosophy.

Brown actively engaged with various advisory committees, giving parents and community members ways to help tackle the challenges and directly contribute to the success of the school. Skyrocketing graduation rates, greater student success on tests, and more college credits earned all proved that the changes were having a real impact on students.

His leadership changed the way business is done at MHS. That legacy will have a lasting impact on the school. But it indeed may be his outrageous sense of humor and his wisdom that people will most remember. He changed the lives of the staff, students, and community members of Marion. And he will always be remembered as the principal who brought back the GIANTS!

It is because of his innovative and distinctive leadership of Marion High School that Brown – despite not being an alumnus of Marion High School – is an honorary inductee into the MHS Hall of Distinction.

Before becoming principal of MHS, Brown served as assistant superintendent for three years and interim superintendent for one at Anderson Community Schools. Prior to that, he served as principal at Anderson Highland High School for 21 years, assistant principal at Anderson High School for six years, and assistant principal at Maurice Robinson Elementary School for one year. He started his career in education as a technology teacher at Central Junior High School (later East Side Middle School), where he taught for six years.

He also served with the U.S. Army in Germany for three years.
Brown has been presented with numerous awards, including the Sagamore of the Wabash, the highest honor given by the governor of Indiana, presented to him in 2013 in acknowledgment of his role in the extraordinary transformation at Marion High School. In 1995 he was named IASP Principal of the Year and NASSP State Principal of the Year.

He earned his bachelor’s degree in technology education from Jackson State University, his master’s degree in educational administration from Ball State University, and his educational specialist degree in superintendency from Ball State University.

As he planned his retirement, Brown reiterated his commitment to the continued well-being and success of Marion High School and pledged his continued support with a simple statement: “Forever a Giant.”