

By Jan Schultz, The Imperial Republican News Editor

Tom Osborne's last official day with the University of Nebraska athletic department arrived a few weeks ago on June 30.

You may remember he actually retired in January, but stayed on, putting in nine-hour days from reports, to help the new A.D. Shawn Eichorst move into the job.

What a legacy Osborne is leaving at Nebraska!

His legacy goes far beyond the two outright national NCAA football championships he won as the Huskers' head coach in 1994 and 1995, and the sharing of another in 1997. Not to mention winning or sharing the Big 8 conference title 12 times, along with one in the Big 12. His 255-49-3 record is the fifth best of all time.

He later filled the role as Athletic Director and then served six years in the U.S. House of Representatives.

While his tall, slender, always-calm demeanor on the sidelines is a picture many of us have when we think of the much-loved Nebraska coach, he likely is affecting as many young people with his TeamMates program.

I have always admired the program, started by Osborne and his wife Nancy in 1991, which pairs a youth-at-risk with an adult mentor.

Originally started with 22 Husker football players as mentors to youngsters in Lincoln, TeamMates is now in more than 120 communities in Nebraska, serving more than 4,000 students in grades 4-12.

The program matches a student with an adult volunteer to provide one hour of individual mentoring each week during the school year. Activities during the hour range from homework assignments to sharing common interests to simply talking.

Who knows how many youths have a better life thanks to Osborne's program?

Osborne will long be remembered in Nebraska and across the country as the Huskers' beloved coach, as well as his time as Athletic Director.

Yet, I would venture to say there are a lot of youths and young adults out there today who will rather remember Osborne because of what they gained from TeamMates.

It might be something Imperial needs to pursue as a program for youths here.

Thanks for the years you have given Nebraska, Tom. You are one of the great ones!