

The gym at Wheatland Junior High School is usually filled with students who cheer while athletes sink baskets, their tennis shoes shuffling across polished floors.

But Tuesday afternoon, there was a somber silence across the gym as friends, teachers and students came to say goodbye to the school's principal and his wife.

Hundreds attended a memorial service for Kathryn and Samuel Ferris Morrison. She was 53. He was 60.

The couple died last week in apparent murder-suicide, each from a single gunshot wound. Local police are treating Mrs. Morrison's death as a homicide, Sgt. Randy Chesser said.

She suffered from multiple sclerosis and had been in a wheelchair for nearly 30 years. She had been a teacher for a brief time while in town until the illness cut her career short.

Both were well respected in this farming community of 3500 people north of Cheyenne.

The Rev. Delbert Dick spoke about them during the service. He was surrounded by more than a dozen bouquets of colorful flowers, another silent tribute to the couple.

Dick and his family lived next door to the Morrison's for nearly 30 years. He told stories about the couple that came from people who knew them.

"How many who are here had Mr. Morrison as a teacher?" he said as hundreds of hands shot up across the gym.

Many hands also went up when he asked whether they had Mrs. Morrison as a teacher.

"How many remember Mr. Morrison in regards to erasers?" he asked, smiling as people smiled.

Friends and students said after the service that Morrison would sometimes good-naturedly toss chalkboard erasers at students who didn't pay attention in class.

Morrison taught history and social studies at the school for nearly 30 years. He had been the school's track coach and once it's athletic director.

He was principal for the last year and had announced his resignation effective at the end of the school term.

"We have a lily in our flower bed that Kathy gave to us," Dick said. "It's something we'll cherish even more."

One memory he told was about a faculty pie-eating contest. A teacher teased Morrison, saying the length of his nose might interfere with his eating.

In playful response, Morrison tossed a pie at him. The other teacher ducked and the pie landed on a seventh-grade girl.

Dick said Morrison's met when they were young teachers in Wheatland. She was a vocal teacher who had graduated from a college in South Dakota. Morrison took her to a faculty picnic. They were married in 1971.

Mrs. Morrison was devoted to the Wyoming chapter of American Association of University Women. She was named an Outstanding Young Woman of America twice-in 1976 and 1979.