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Class Act: What goes around, comes around
Primary first grade teacher's inspiration to enter education
 BY JOHN HAUER
 For the Daily Call

PIQUA - In a **classic** example of 'what goes around, comes around', Springcreek Primary School first grade teacher Judi Nicholl was inspired by her first grade teacher to enter education and help others.



Mike Ullery/Staff photo
Judi Nicholl gives her class a "thumbs-up" as they prepare to go to recess at Springcreek School last week.

"When I was in first grade my teacher Mrs. Sarver paired me with another student to peer teach and help this student learn her sight words," Nicholl said. "This first teaching opportunity made me feel very responsible as a six year old. It's a feeling I never forgot and got me thinking about becoming a teacher." In high school, Nicholl taught in her church's Junior Church Program. "I enjoyed working with children and this reinforced my desire to teach."

Nicholl grew up in western Pennsylvania, north of Pittsburgh. "Yes, I am a huge Steelers fan," she said. In second grade, the family moved to Sarver, Pa. "I always recall those feelings when I was a new student walking into a new **classroom**," she said. "I try hard to make my new students feel welcome and part of our **classroom**."

She graduated from Freeport Area Senior High School in 1975. Nicholl was in National Honor Society, a writer and co-editor of the school paper, and played clarinet in both the Marching and Concert Bands. After school, she was a Candy Striper at the local hospital and played piano at her church.

Through her church, Nicholl learned of Cedarville University in Ohio. "I attended **activities** for teens there several times while I was in high school," she said. "I felt very comfortable on campus and I made friends there, so it was my choice to earn my bachelor's." She graduated in 1979 with a degree in elementary education. Nicholl returned to Cedarville in 1995 to add kindergarten certification to her teaching license. She has a master's degree in the art of teaching from Marygrove College in Michigan.

Nicholl landed her first teaching position at Community Christian Academy in Piqua in 1979. "That's what brought me to Piqua, and I have been here ever since," she said. After three years teaching 1st and 2nd grade at the Academy, she decided to stay at home to raise her children. "I tutored students academically and also taught piano lessons in my home for many years," Nicholl said. "At church, I have been the nursery director, a Sunday school and summer Bible school teacher, the junior church director, and the musical director for children and teens," she said.

When her oldest started high school, Nicholl decided it was a good time to return to teaching in the **classroom**. "We lived in Piqua and our children attended Piqua City Schools, so I wanted to teach in our home community," she said. "I started subbing, then, became a long term sub at High Street School." In 1998, she was hired as a Title One Reading teacher for Springcreek, and a year later, switched to 1st grade teacher. "I have been in this **classroom** ever since, teaching what I love best - first grade," she said. "I always wanted to be a first grade teacher."

Holidays are a fun time for first graders. "My students get excited about any holiday,"



Nicholl said. "At that age, everything is still pretty new. I love experiencing these joys and wonders with them. Their excitement is contagious." At Christmas, it is Christmas Around the World, and students learn about the many customs of different countries. "We learn about St. Nicholas Day and have a fun Gingerbread Man unit." St. Patrick's Day provides a lot of enthusiasm every March. "The students make traps to try to catch those pesky leprechauns who always seem to get away," she said. "It is a great way to learn a bit about Ireland."

At home, Nicholl and her husband Gary, a counselor at Corinn's Way and a rec assistant at Riverside, have been married 32 years. They have four daughters and a son. Andrew is the associate pastor of worship at Fairhaven Church in Centerville. Natalie is a music teacher and assistant band director at Wayne High School. Kathryn is a social worker and works with senior citizens in Xenia. Megan works at Loma Farms in Tipp City. And, the youngest, Haleigh is a kindergarten student at Nicholas School. "She was adopted from China two years ago when she was four," Nicholl said. "She has blessed our family in so many ways."



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