

# Pitsenbarger displays strong sense of community

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For the Daily Call  
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PIQUA — Piqua High School educator Joyce Pitsenbarger saves students. The teacher for the school's Novanet program is the last chance for some at-risk kids to get a high school diploma.

Pitsenbarger graduated from Piqua High School in 1976. She was active in the school choir, but much of her after-school time was spent with the Girl Scouts, 4-H, and activities with the Piqua Christian Church. "I was in the church

youth group and sang and played piano in the church choir," she said. "My pastor, Dave Huddelson, influenced me to go to college at Ozark Christian College." She majored in Christian education and earned her bachelor's degree in 1983.



At Ozark, Pitsenbarger continued her singing and playing piano in their choir and became a member of the college's sign choir. She joined the girls' basketball team as a trainer. The team did much more than practice and play games.

"When we played an away game on Saturday,



MIKE ULLERY/STAFF PHOTO

Joyce Pitsenbarger works in her Piqua High School classroom last week.

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we went early on Friday and stayed through Monday and helped the local community and church in any way they needed," she said. "We were called the Ambassadors for Christ, and we did everything from take area youth on a field trip to assist a church family with clean-up and repairs."

The experience reinforced Pitsenbarger's strong sense of service and community. "In the off-season, we would spend a longer period of time in a community," she said. "Once, we went to Wyoming for a whole week to help out a town." The opportunities working with youth, families, and communities convinced Pitsenbarger that she should pursue a career in education.

After college, she moved back to the area and spent five years at the Kiddy Campus Daycare in Piqua. Next,

Pitsenbarger worked at Nicholas School in the motor skills program. She headed up the three-year process to be state-approved to become a charter school. She also served as principal of the school.

Pitsenbarger left education for a brief time and worked as an order specialist at Grace Christian bookstore. "I worked closely with churches on special orders," she said. "But after awhile, I knew I had to get back in education." She applied with Piqua City Schools because her sister, Ann Toon, worked as an English as a Second Language teacher for the district. Pitsenbarger subbed for Piqua doing everything from study hall aide, secretary, aide a special needs student, to In-School Suspension teacher.

In 2009, the high school started Novanet, a credit recovery program for at-risk students. Pitsenbarger was

hired to direct the program and has seen it steadily grow. "We started with 10 computers, and we had to load the programs in-house," she said. "Today, we have 30 computers with software that is online."

Students can take the Novanet classes during the regular school day or in special second shift/at home programs under the direction of Leann Buchanan. The biggest successes have been seniors who have failed classes earlier and are in jeopardy of not graduating. "Our first year of operation, 35 seniors were able to earn the credits they were missing and graduate with their class," Pitsenbarger said.

"Novanet allows students who would normally drop out stay in school and receive a high school diploma," she said. "It is gratifying to watch them turn things around and succeed. I enjoy the one-on-one set-up that

Novanet offers."

At home, Pitsenbarger likes to cook, play piano, and sew. Her sewing talents have landed her a unique job as the person in charge of the high school's costume loft where everything is stored for PHS plays and musicals. "My sister, Ann, got me involved to sew costumes for the musical 'The King and I,' and things just escalated from there," she said. Pitsenbarger also helps with productions in the summer performed by the Music Warehouse.