

Unconventional path leads to education



BY JOHN HAUER
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PIQUA — Piqua Junior High School math teacher Julie Henkaline has achieved success as an educator. But, she took a somewhat unconventional path to enter the field of education.

Henkaline grew up in Piqua and graduated from Piqua Central High School in 1975. "Born and raised a Piqua Indian," she is quick to say. Henkaline was a co-

MIKE ULLERY/STAFF PHOTO
Piqua Junior High math teacher Julie Henkaline works with seventh-grader Allie Cox in her classroom last week.



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editor of the yearbook, a member of National Honor Society, a football and basketball cheerleader, and Prom Queen.

"I wanted to be a teacher," she said. "My parents Bob and Lucy Fess instilled in me a strong work ethic and modeled service to others, good qualities for a future teacher." Henkaline enrolled at Wittenberg University. "I spent a year there, then, transferred to Otterbein University," she said. "Marriage and family were next,

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so I put my college degree on hold."

In 1980, she joined the work force and took a position as secretary to Piqua High School athletic director Ed Purk. "Mr. Purk had been my health teacher in high school, so he knew the kind of person I was when he hired me," she said. "It was a wonderful 12 ½ years. Ed did everything with a total commitment and integrity. I learned so much from him."

When Purk retired, Henkaline pondered a return to college to complete her degree. "Mr. Purk always encouraged me to go back to school," she said. "Our youngest daughter entered high school, and it was the perfect time for me to return to college." She earned her bachelor's of education degree from Wittenberg in 1995. Later, she received a master's degree in education from Wright State University.

Henkaline did her student teaching in language arts and math with the late Ginny James and Elly Snapp at Wilder Junior High. After graduation, Henkaline was hired by Piqua City Schools and spent two years teaching 7th grade health and science at Wilder. "It wasn't the normal path to take to become a teacher," she said. "On my first day of school as a rookie teacher, I was 38 years old."

"With all my life experiences up to that time including raising a family and working in a school setting, I felt ready and good about my new career," she said. "I knew I was in the right place doing what I was

meant to do."

In 1999, the junior high opened in the new building, and by that time, Henkaline had switched to math. Today, Henkaline teaches Math 7 and Pre-Algebra. "I was fortunate to have Elly Snapp as a mentor when I started," Henkaline said. "She taught me how to teach math to junior high students. I am the math teacher I am today because of Elly." And, that is a very successful math teacher. Henkaline was named Piqua City Schools Teacher of the Year for the 2005-2006 school year. "I love working with this age group," Henkaline said. "They are very impressionable, and I can make a huge difference in their lives, academically and personally."

"I have been blessed to have had excellent educators and mentors in my life," she said. "Hopefully, I am paying those blessings forward." Henkaline gives credit to her colleagues at the junior high. "I work with an amazing staff, and I do not view them merely as co-workers. They have become my friends."

Henkaline and her husband Ken, a hair stylist who owns the Hair Studio on High, have been married 30 years. They have two sons and two daughters. Heather Gable is married and living in Asheville, N.C., Lindsay Dobucki is married and expecting her first child in Baltimore, Md. Son Heath is married and living in Grove City. And, son Mark Matthews is married and living in Greenville, S.C. There are five grandchildren with another on the way. "Our favorite vacation spot used to be Gatlinburg," Julie said. "Now, it is wherever our kids and grandkids live. My new favorite pastime is being Grammy to our little ones."

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