

Teaching goal for Burkhardt

Education stressed during youth

Nicklin kindergarten teacher Mary Burkhardt works with a student in her classroom last week.



MIKE ULLERY/STAFF PHOTO

“I have always wanted to be a teacher,”
— Mary Burkhardt

BY JOHN HAUER
For the Daily Call
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PIQUA — It takes a special person to work with five- and six-year-olds every day.



Nicklin Learning Center kindergarten teacher Mary Burkhardt is just that special person. “I have always wanted to be a teacher,” she said. “And, I have always wanted to teach the little ones.”

Burkhardt was born in

Lakewood and graduated from Byzantine High School in 1971. “It was a small Catholic school outside of Parma,” Burkhardt said. “There weren’t any girls’ sports during this time, so I was active in Pep Club.” The school closed a few years later in the mid-70s.

“My goal was to become a K-3 teacher,” she said. “During my high school years, I worked at a Day Care Center, and I knew I wanted to be with the younger kids.”

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Her parents Patricia and Robert Walsh stressed education and encouraged Mary to go to college. “Mom checked my homework every night.”

Burkhardt started her college career at Cuyahoga Community College. “It was a little unusual at first because my father who was a policeman was taking classes there, too,” she said. She transferred to Kent State University and completed her bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education in 1976. Later, she earned a master’s degree from Walden University. She has taken 30-plus additional hours through Drake University.

After Kent State, Burkhardt landed her first job at St. Columbkille Elementary School in Parma where she taught first grade for three years. Next, Burkhardt and her husband Norm moved to Medina, and she taught third grade at St. Francis Xavier School for eight years. “I taught at several different school districts

as my husband pursued his education administration career,” she said. “Norm eventually became a superintendent at Ft. Loramie Schools and Vandalia-Butler Schools.”

When Norm was named superintendent of Vandalia Schools, the family moved to Butler Township where they live today. “I taught kindergarten at Marion Local Schools for nine years,” Mary said. “Then, I took a job with Piqua City Schools to be a little closer to home.” She started at South Street School, but went to Nicklin when it became an all kindergarten building.

“We do a lot of hands-on activities because our stu-

dents learn by doing,” she said. “The other day, the kids made applesauce and got to sample their efforts.” The class motto is “Yes, I Can.” “We say that every day after we say the Pledge of Allegiance,” Burkhardt said. “This was chosen as our class motto because I stress to the students that the more they practice at something, the better they get, and the more they succeed.”

One class project involves planting tulip bulbs now and waiting for the colorful results in the spring. Another project is carving Halloween pumpkins and leaving them outside the window so students can watch the different stages of deterioration

over the following months.

Burkhardt has a multitude of other duties outside her classroom. She is chairperson for the Nicklin Intervention Assistance team that helps parents and students who have learning difficulties. She is part of the district’s Race to the Top federal grant committee and the Ready School grant committee. She works on a CIP committee that reviews the kindergarten’s continuous improvement plan.

She is very proud that she has had the opportunity to mentor seven new teachers over the years. Burkhardt’s effectiveness as an educator was recognized in 2009, when she was named a

Master Teacher by the district.

In her spare time, she enjoys reading, walking the dog, and exercising at the Vandalia Rec Center. She and Norm have been married 34 years. He is retired from public education, but is a part time instructor at the

University of Dayton. The couple has a daughter and a son. Thomas will graduate soon from the University of Toledo with a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering. Kate, a school teacher, is married and living in California with her husband who is in the Navy.

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