

Teachers a big influence on Thompson

BY JOHN HAUER

For the Daily Call
editorial@dailycall.com

PIQUA — Anyone who enters Room 303 at Wilder Intermediate School is in store for a very unique greeting. Two large aquariums dominate the wall opposite the doorway, and a dozen assorted goldfish and turtles will rush to the glass. Their welcome is led by Wilbur the turtle who has almost 20 years of experience in a classroom setting. Obviously, this is a science room, and it is the 5th grade science class of teacher Merrienne Thompson.

Thompson is from the Piqua area and graduated from Houston High School

in 1990. She played flute and piccolo in the Marching Band, Concert Band, and Pep Band. She was in Drama Club and kept stats for the track and cross country teams. "I knew I wanted to go to college," she said. "And, I knew I would have to work to pay for it."

She enrolled at Edison Community College and took general ed courses while working full-time at Meijer's in Troy. Thompson transferred to Wright State University and earned her bachelor's degree in K-8 Elementary Education in 1999. Later, she received a master's degree from WSU in the

class act



Teacher Leader program.

"I grew up on a farm and liked animals," she said. "I liked being around kids and showing them how to care for animals, so teaching was a natural choice." Thompson credits two of her teachers as big influences in her career decision. "My fifth-grade teacher Mr. Borchers lit the fire and got me interested in learning," she said. "Mr. Abbott, my high school English teacher,

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MIKE ULLERY/STAFF PHOTO

Wilder fourth-grade teacher Merrienne Thompson and her students spend some time with Wilbur Turtle last week. Wilbur resides in a large aquarium in the room and has been a student favorite for a number of years.

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kept telling me I would be a good teacher."

After WSU, Thompson subbed for a few months, then, landed a first grade teaching position in reading at High Street. This lasted one year, and she switched to Wilder to teach fourth grade. "At first, I taught all subjects to my fourth- or fifth-graders," she said. "Now, I teach only science to fourth and fifth grade."

Thompson's motto is best summed up by the ancient Chinese Proverb that is on the wall by her desk — Give a man a

fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. "I want to get the students excited and involved in their education," she said. "We do many hands-on projects, and I bring in outside sources to get kids interested."

Tara Hastings from TV 2 Weather came in to talk about meteorology and climate change. Thompson and the author committee brought in well-known author and illustrator Christopher Canyon who illustrated 'The Grand Canyon' and 'The Ever Living Tree' as a guest speaker for the district.

Detectives from the Piqua Police demonstrated fingerprinting and showed how they use the scientific process. A life size cut out of Adam and Jamie from The Mythbusters on the Discovery Channel is in one corner of the room. "I use several episodes from The Mythbusters to show scientific methods and the truth or fiction of some common beliefs," she said. "The students really enjoy the show and learn some valuable lessons."

Thompson and the other Wilder science teachers Brandi Dingle and Beth Sullenberger work together to provide

a seamless progression for the fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders. They collaborate for the annual Science Night in October. Thompson was awarded a \$3000 Martha Holden Jennings grant to fund the event. "Volunteers man ten different science stations," she said. "It has been a big hit with both students and parents."

At home, Merrienne combines her hobbies of travelling, hiking, scrapbooking, and photography to put together presentations for the classroom. "We have gone to many destinations including Europe, southern California, the

Tetons, Yellowstone, and Jackson Hole, Wyoming," she said. "I use those pictures when the class covers topics such as erosion, weathering, land forms, fault lines, and earthquakes."

Thompson and her husband Dwayne, a former teacher for Piqua City Schools and now a curriculum director for PCS, have been married eight years. Dwayne is quick to point out, "By the way, Wilbur was my turtle 18 years ago when I taught kindergarten at South Street." The couple has twin daughters and a son. Wesley is four years old and Julia and Brenna are five.