

Turn leads to principal position

Credits parents with instilling strong work ethic



MIKE ULLERY/STAFF PHOTO

Favorite Hill School principal Mindy Gearhardt chats with a student in the cafeteria last week.

BY JOHN HAUER

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PIQUA — Favorite Hill Primary School principal Mindy Gearhardt took an interesting and round about path to get to the 'big' desk at her building. A lack of job openings in her chosen field of cardiac rehabilitation led to a successful career in education.

Gearhardt attended Washington Elementary and Bennett Junior High. She graduated from Piqua High School in 1992. She was a member of the National Honor Society, girls' basketball, show choir, and played trumpet in the marching band. "I was in one of the first Show Choir groups to travel to Florida and perform at Disney World," she said. "It was an exciting field trip."

She credits her parents John and Karen Gearhardt with instilling in her a strong work ethic. "My Grandpa and Grandma Smith also encouraged me. They had a farm and knew about hard work. With my parents and grandparents help, I was a 4-H member for ten years."

After high school, Gearhardt enrolled at the University of Toledo. "I thought about majoring in pharmacy, but it did not work out for me," she said. "When

class act



I was in junior high, my grandpa underwent open heart surgery, and I decided on a major involving cardiac rehabilitation." Before she earned her bachelor's degree in exercise science in cardiac rehab, Gearhardt interned at Toledo Hospital.

"One day I was with a patient who was on the treadmill," she said. "He suffered a heart attack and literally fell into my arms. Fortunately, the trauma team resuscitated him, and I helped play a small part in saving his life." The experience convinced Gearhardt she was in the right career.

When she left UT, Gearhardt could not find any job openings in her field. She settled for a position with the Miami County Waste Department. "They wanted me to start an educational program for area schools about going green and recycling," she said. "I visited area schools and gave classroom presentations."

It was after one of these presentations that Gearhardt's life took a drastic turn. "I always had a connection with Piqua schools," she said. "My mother was and still is the secretary at Sprincreek, and I coached freshman and junior varsity girls' basketball for varsity head coaches Jerrel Morgan and Dan Penrod."

Springcreek teacher Mary Ellen King commented to Gearhardt that she had really made a connection with the students with her presentation. "Mrs. King told me I should seriously consider teaching,"

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Gearhardt said. "At the same time, I read a newspaper ad from Urbana University about earning an education degree with life credits." That set the wheels in motion, and Gearhardt received a bachelor's degree in elementary education in 1998. Later, she earned a master's degree in education and a principal's certification from Wright State University.

"I did my student teaching with Lynn Gastineau at Washington School," Gearhardt said. "She was my fourth-grade

teacher, and then, she became my mentor. I learned a lot from her both as a student and as a student teacher."

After serving as a long-term kindergarten sub, Gearhardt was given a permanent position teaching fifth grade at Favorite Hill. After the district realignment, she transferred to fifth grade at Bennett where she taught for nine years. Then, she became a principal and is in her fourth year in this position at Favorite Hill.

Gearhardt is in charge of a building of more than 300 students and a staff of 35. "It is a challenge to try to keep up with

everything and everybody," she said. "Multi-tasking is a must."

Even on the most challenging days, Gearhardt knows she can always rely on the students. "Any time I am having a tough day, I walk into a classroom and I'm caught up in the excitement and enthusiasm of the kids. They seem to know when you need a laugh or a hug."

Gearhardt cites the dedication of the Favorite Hill staff as the big factor for the success of the students. "Our staff cares deeply about the students," she said. "We want our kids to be successful in school and in life. And, we have a wonderful group

of very supportive parents."

Away from school, Gearhardt enjoys gardening, fishing, and anything outside. She has recently taken up golf, and she has played co-ed softball for 10 years. She is involved within her church, as well as, the Piqua Optimist Club and the Piqua Juvenile Education Fund Board (D.A.R.E. Board). Two years ago, she started volunteering with Horses and Humans Helping Each Other in Versailles. "It is an equestrian therapy and riding program for people with special gifts and needs," she said. "It is very rewarding for everyone involved."