

Phyllis Neeley Is Brunswick County's Teacher Of Year

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

One of Phyllis Neeley's characteristic means of communicating with parents of her Lincoln Primary students is the "Cheery Note." It is sent home bearing a positive message about the child, with a sketch of a cheerleader and the heading, "Something to cheer about!"

Now this perky, energetic physical education teacher has something of her own to cheer about. Whereas little Susie's note might say, "Susie was great at jumping rope today," Neeley's cheery message came over the school intercom Friday noon, the announcement that she had been chosen Brunswick County Teacher of the Year.

"I was surprised, stunned, thrilled," she said with a big smile, then recalled her interview the day before, along with eight other county candidates.

"They asked me about dealing with parents, what I thought about AIDS awareness, sex education, and condom distribution, and what I would do about the Los Angeles riots if I were president of the United States," she recalled.

Mrs. Neeley doesn't duck subjects like this.

"I don't think condoms and sex education are the school's responsibility," she said, "but if parents want us to do it, we should have trained

people teaching. Education is the key in all of this."

As for the riots, she pinpointed the implications for schools: "There was an undercurrent that our kids are not prepared to work," she said.

This forthright woman has been teaching at Lincoln Primary for 10 years. She remembered how determined she was to have the job, during the time she was a substitute teacher and parent volunteer there.

"Mr. Clemmons (the late principal James Clemmons) used to tell me to go back for my elementary education certificate so he could hire me in the classroom," she said, "but I said, 'No, I'm going to teach P.E.'"

"Somehow, I just knew the man teaching it would leave and sure enough, he resigned one August, just after I applied for his job in June. I went to work the next day."

Neeley had been on a 13-year hiatus from teaching to raise her two sons. A native of Pennsylvania, she had earned her bachelor's of science degree at Temple University in health and physical education, then spent two years as a junior high teacher in that state and two years in a Maryland junior high school.

She and her husband Kirk moved to the Brunswick County area 17 years ago. They live in Olde Pointe and he works at the Du Pont plant, while Scott, 21, is in pre-law at East



STAFF PHOTO BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

PHYLIS NEELEY enjoys a rare moment of relaxation in the teacher's lounge at Lincoln Primary School, after hearing of her selection as Brunswick County Teacher of the year.

Carolina University and Todd, 17, is a junior at North Brunswick High School.

Neeley is still happy with her job

be creative in teaching physical education.

"I don't like to be stagnant or teach the same way over and over," she said. "I like a variety of activities, but I stress one thing with every student, that they can do anything they put their minds to. A sign in the gym says, 'I can do that!'"

Her expertise is a resource for other classroom teachers in presenting language arts, math, science and the arts, she said. "I reinforce science principles by working with the incline mat and using a basketball to teach light refraction. With math, we do games where they must know numbers; we jump rope and make shapes with it."

In the kindergarten class, Neeley said, she dismisses them sometimes by the colors of their socks or by birth dates, requiring them to know these basics.

Her cheery notes are a constant. "I send home 48 a day," she said, "six in every class. Regardless of how the child is doing, I find something good to say, like, 'Brian is listening better today.' This school stresses a positive approach."

Nevertheless, her face grows serious in discussing discipline.

"Rules are posted at the beginning of the year and everyone knows what's expected," she said. "The first time a rule is violated, I take the

child's name; the second time, they have to sit out and can't participate. A third violation would mean calling the parents in, but I've never had to do that. The real punishment for my kids is not being able to participate. They really love the classes."

Neeley's positive outlook has come the hard way, through years of tending her younger son through a rare illness. After suffering a form of mononucleosis five years ago, his reaction to it was a handicapping one, with his speech and mobility affected. While Todd has improved greatly today and is a top student at North Brunswick, he still has difficulty walking. Over the last five years, his mother said, he has endured a variety of tests, biopsies and treatment that have tested the family's patience and courage.

"I believe this has happened to him for a reason," Neeley said, her eyes filling. "Already we see that other students around him look at life differently. I hope they will take better care of themselves as a result."

Neeley's recent honor is in a proud tradition at Lincoln Primary. At least three other teachers from the school have represented the county in this way, including Betty Chaison, Esther Smith and Jane Miller. Her next step is regional competition.

School Board Hears Updates, Poetry, Parental Concerns

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

Concerns about a reading program and a law enforcement presence in high schools preceded an "end-of-school" gathering of reports and updates Monday night by the Brunswick County Board of Education.

It met in the cafeteria of Bolivia Elementary School, with a buffet supper served before the meeting.

A poetic beginning to the meeting was provided by Rodney Joyner, whose poem about teaching love was chosen to be published in a magazine that often uses student writing. After Rodney read his poem, Board Chairman Donna Baxter congratulated him and presented him with a check for \$100 from the publication.

Parental Concerns

Sybil Mitchell Simmons told board members her opposition to the continual presence of sheriff's deputies on local high school campuses comes from something a teenager told her.

"(The girl) said the school staff doesn't try to come in and help anyone when there are fights; they just let the police handle it," Simmons related. "I read in the Wilmington paper about the police officers in their high schools and one of them was quoted as saying, 'When I'm not there...all Hell breaks loose.'"

The mother and former teacher and assistant principal urged board members to reconsider the use of deputies in schools, saying, "The message we send kids is that we hold them down until someone is there to deal with them. If you put one officer in a school this year, next year you'll need two, and then three. We just saw L.A. burn, and I don't want that to happen to our schools."

Mrs. Baxter responded, "I understand what you're saying, but times have changed in this country. We have teachers getting hurt and kids shooting each other. We have to do something."

Another mother, Rose Mary Long, complained that her daughter had been neglected in the Reading Recovery program.

"When they began testing her for learning problems, no one saw her in Reading Recovery anymore," she said. "Then I had to have my child declared EMH (Educable Mentally Handicapped) to get her out of the program. I wonder how are the other children in that program being served?"

Jan Toomes, lead teacher in Reading Recovery, said teachers are presently being trained in this new program for first-grade reading problems, at the same time they are working with children. This makes a

slower movement of children through the program, she said.

Buildings And Buses

Assistant Superintendent William Turner reported on construction progress at the new elementary school in Supply, due to open this fall. With everything on schedule, Turner said, the water line is ready to be dedicated to the county, running from the school site along S.R.1502, to connect with county water on U.S. 17.

He said 17 new buses are utilizing the new white tops that have proven to cut down interior heat by 17 degrees. "All new buses we buy from now on will have the white tops," Turner said.

Within two weeks, he reported further, there will be lights on all three high school tennis courts.

"In two school break-ins over the weekend," he concluded, "there was nothing taken and little damage—just broken glass."

Comprehensive School Update

Les Tubbs, principal at South Brunswick Middle School (SBMS), reported on the progress of the comprehensive school approach his school will be using in the fall.

"We've had two half-day conferences with our faculty," he said, "and everything is going well. One thing we want is to use a tough-love bottom line policy. Our program

will be something different from that at the high schools."

Components of the SBMS approach include personal advisers for students; a student services management team to work with problems of high-risk students; the changing of ISS (in-school suspension) to Chill-Out; an extended day program with retesting of students having learning problems and a research/development collaboration period after school for teachers; and networking with the community.

The program will be discussed with parents at a May 28 PTA meeting, Tubbs said.

Reports, Election

Gloria Yount, staff development coordinator, said she is receiving applications for trainers in a new staff development program to be held the first week in August.

"We're using the 15 best of our teachers to give staff development to county schools, when they ask for it," she said.

Board Member Polly Russ heartily endorsed the idea of using county teachers rather than hire outsiders. "I'm glad we're recognizing that we have talented teachers right here," she said.

School board attorney Glenn Peterson reported on his recent attendance at a school board attorney conference, where he said discus-

sions were held on prayer at school functions, the implications for school employees of the American Disabilities Act, and sexual harassment of students by other students. "Will students be able to collect for this kind of harassment?" was the question being asked, Peterson said.

He also pointed out new concerns in hiring school employees. "You can't ask about their handicaps, but you can ask how a particular condition would affect their ability to do a specific job."

School Personnel Changes Get Nod

The Brunswick County Board of Education met Monday at Bolivia Elementary School and concluded its session with approval of the following personnel recommendations:

Margaret Curry of Greensboro was hired as media specialist for Supply Elementary, and Peter Spiliotis of Fayetteville was hired as school psychologist in the central office.

Hired in non-certified positions were Linda Atkinson of Ash as part-time custodian at Waccamaw Elementary; Garry Hill of Ash, as therapeutic assistant at Union Primary; Mary Smith of Ash, as therapeutic assistant at Bolivia Elementary; and Thelma Brown of Supply as assistant secretary at West Brunswick High School (WBHS).

Resignations were accepted from Trena Gavins of Wilmington, as special education teacher at Leland Middle and Marshall Seay of Shallotte as teacher/coach at WBHS. Non-certified resignations came from William Mosley of Leland, as custodian at Leland Middle; Marilys Clemmons of Bolivia as bilingual assistant at Lincoln and Leland Middle; and Mary Webster of Shallotte as therapeutic assistant at Bolivia Elementary.

Retirements were accepted for Esther Troy of Leland, history teacher at NBHS; Lizzie Mitchell of Supply, home economics teacher at South Brunswick High School; and Maggie Munn of Riegelwood, science teacher at NBHS.

A one-year leave of absence was approved for Keith Moore, physical education teacher at (NBHS). Leave for approximately two weeks was granted Marisa Gause, a teacher assistant at Lincoln and Leland Primary schools. Medical leaves were granted Freida Simmons, part-time custodian at Waccamaw Elementary and Lasandra Webb, SIMS operator at (WBHS).

A transfer was approved for John Hewett of Supply, from food service to custodian at Shallotte Middle.

Substitutes approved were as follows: Sherry Bowens of Delco; Christina Register, Ella Johnson and

The board voted to return Dave Kelly and Lewis Stanley to the Board of Trustees of Brunswick Community College, as the Board of Education representatives.

Linda Lowe, of the Southeast Technical Assistance Center, presented a certificate of accreditation to Brunswick County Schools.

Following an executive session and approval of personnel changes, the meeting was recessed until 6:30 Wednesday, May 20. (See personnel story below).

Shades & Shadows

Jean Milligan of Shallotte; Janice Brown and Rhonda Brady of Leland; Karen Massengill and Elaine Bailey of Wilmington; Kristin Farrow and Sally Hart of Wrightsville Beach; Catherine Williams of High Point; and Carol Callahan of Southport.

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Hankins Announces Plan To Retire In September

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

Brunswick County Superintendent of Schools P.R. Hankins Monday night announced plans for his retirement effective Sept. 30.

The announcement came following action on routine personnel matters at a school board meeting Monday at the school system administrative office.

Hankins will retire at the end of his two-year contract with the board, as he had suggested he might when he accepted the post in 1990.

After 40 years in public education, Hankins leaves the profession having served in nearly every possible capacity in Brunswick County schools. He has been a high school science teacher, elementary school principal, and assistant and associate superintendent. Named interim superintendent in the spring 1990, when former Superintendent John Kaufhold was dismissed, Hankins was then hired to the post that September.

The native Brunswick Countian

said when he applied for the superintendent's job, "It's something I've always wanted to do; it would be nice to tell my grandchildren about."

Before deciding to seek the job, Hankins had been on the verge of retiring, something he's now determined to do.

"I want to just kick back now," he said Tuesday. "I've got some fishing to do, because I really like to fish and I've

only gone fishing six times in the past two years."

During his brief tenure as superintendent, Hankins said he believes the school system has "taken a turn," with the dropout rate declining to a present 2.39 percent and new programs like the comprehensive schools approach, aimed at improving education.

"I want to keep doing some things with the schools and the children," he noted.

Donna Baxter, chairperson of the Brunswick County Board of Education, said of the retiring superintendent, "He will go down in the history books for promoting education with Brunswick County more than anyone. He'll be sorely missed."

Hankins's education included a bachelor of science degree from Johnson C. Smith University, a master's of science degree from A.&T. State University and further study at N.C. Central University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and East Carolina University.

Hankins is married, has three foster children and lives in Bolivia.



HANKINS

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