

LOCAL

Surprise party honors Blanton's 30+ years of teaching

She retires this week

REBECCA T. DICKINSON

rdickinson@kingsmountainherald.com

Only minutes from the 2:30 p.m. bell, on Monday, teacher assistant Susan Peterson and co-worker Lori Evatt organized Grover Elementary third-graders into a line. They headed across the outside sidewalk - through 100 degree heat - to the other side of the school, where Mrs. Blanton's empty classroom awaits.

But the silent, empty room wouldn't stay so for long. The walls were about to echo with the shouts of "Surprise!" in a special party planned in honor of Mrs. Blanton's long career.

"We need to go," Evatt said.

"I know this woman She'll see us," said Peterson, Blanton's long-time assistant.

The "woman" is six-time Teacher of the Year and soon-to-be housewife, Kathryn Blanton. After graduating from Appalachian State with a Master's in Education she began her career, age 22, at Grover School.

"I left after a few years when the town's population was decreasing and went to North Elementary," says Blanton.

She taught first-grade for 25 years at North before returning to Grover. She received much

school-recognition, and had the choice of choosing what kind of training she wanted.

"Teachers have to keep on taking classes, but I had a choice. I went with Language Arts. But the most rewarding of it all is to be recognized by my colleagues," states Blanton.

Upon coming back to Grover she was close to retirement and felt a need for change so she moved on to third grade.

"She celebrates the spirit of a child on a daily basis," says co-worker and parent of one of Blanton's students, Michelle Quinn.

"She is an outstanding teacher, mentor, role model, friend, and community member...I could keep on going," Evatt said in an email.

To honor Blanton, one teacher, two assistants, two parents, and the third-grade class surprised her with a homemade cake, balloons, and gifts. She received a necklace, on which her initials were engraved, a bracelet, and plastic green Marti-Gras glasses.

Sporting some of her new gifts, she struck a pose with her hand behind her neck playfully saying, "Do I look beautiful?"

Fellow teachers and parents commented on how young Blanton looks, especially after over 30 years of teaching. "If



REBECCA DICKINSON/HERALD

Students hide and get ready to yell "Surprise!" as Lori Evatt prepares party decorations in honor of Mrs. Kathryn Blanton's over 30 years of teaching. She is retiring from Grover Elementary.

you were expecting a white-haired woman to walk in this room, you were mistaken," Peterson said. "But how she stays young is a secret only her

hair dresser knows."

Or it could be the child-like attitude Blanton has kept through the years. "I believe in respecting their individual spirit," she said.

In her retirement she plans to give her house "some much needed attention," and to spend more time with her daughter,

rising Kings Mountain High School senior, Megan Blanton.

"We'll see what the Lord opens up from here," she said.

However, it proved not up to the administration to let her go on Monday, but up to the third graders who continued hugging her long after the tolling of the after-school bell.



Left, Jada Donaldson gives her teacher Kathryn Blanton a hug after the class surprised her with a party. Lori Evatt and Madison Hoyle wait for their hugs too. Top, Mrs. Blanton opens gifts from her students, parents and supporting teachers.



REBECCA DICKINSON/HERALD

After over 30 years of teaching Kings Mountain and Grover students, Mrs. Kathryn Blanton is surprised with a party and a cake bearing the sentiments and gratitude of many.

PHOTOGRAPH BY REBECCA DICKINSON FOR THE KINGS MOUNTAIN HERALD