

Congratulations Retirees!

Tom Behm

Tom has been a wonderful teacher and colleague for the past 34 years. He's taught 4th, 5th, and 6th grades at McGuire and Rosebush schools, teaching 19 years at McGuire and 15 at Rosebush. He wants us to know how much he admires the hard work and dedication of his fellow teachers and wishes that everyone could realize what a difficult and important job we have. Tom's first responsibility in retirement will be his daughter Alexis' wedding in Indianapolis. After that he intends to take his time to make plans and also get in some hunting and fishing. We will really miss Tom and his great sense of humor at McGuire.

Mike Knoll

Mike Knoll has been serving the Mt. Pleasant Public Schools for 35 years in many capacities. Believe it or not, he started as a part-time bus driver when he was finishing his degree at CMU. Since then he has taught Elementary Art, in a general education classroom, and has been in the Title I program for quite a while.

He has been in Vowles, Pullen, Rosebush, and Ganiard at one time or another. Currently Mike is a Title I teacher at Ganiard, where he will be sorely missed.

Mike's advice to us after all of his years of teaching is to, "Keep the faith".

In retirement, Mike will not be at a loss for activities to fill his time. "I will be following my wife around like a lost puppy, hoping I am able to do the laundry, and occasionally shop at Krogers." Good luck, Mike!!

Kathy Kobylarz

Kathy Kobylarz has spent 34 years starting children off on the right foot in their school careers. She taught 2 years in Utica, 2 years in Grand Haven, and 1 year in Chippewa Hills. She's been with us in Mt. Pleasant for 29 years teaching Title I Reading and 1st Grade in Rosebush. Kathy has many plans for the coming months. She and her husband plan to camp with their granddaughter and travel in the eastern United States.

They're also planning a week at a New Jersey beach and a short vacation in Chicago. Kathy also loves to garden and you will probably see her in her garden if you travel down High Street this summer. When winter comes, she and Ken will be cross country skiing. Kathy is looking forward to having time to enjoy her hobbies of quilting, basketmaking, and scrapbooking. She also plans to read A LOT. Everyone at Rosebush will miss her but luckily she will be back next year as their ArtReach picture lady.

Lynn Laskowsky

Lynn taught English and US History at Clare High School for thirty-two years and officially retired thinking he would be young enough to enjoy a second career.. After a summer of missing school and neat kids, he says "I was encouraged to take a part time position at MPHS; I decided I would love to teach again, especially with an abbreviated schedule in an extremely beautiful new building! The staff and administration have been wonderful colleagues, and I have felt at home in the building teaching English 10, Advanced Grammar, and Advanced Composition. While working at MPHS, I was approached by CMU to work as a Student Teacher Coordinator for the Education Department, and I have been involved with the program for nearly four years. I plan to continue with CMU for a number of years before retiring for good!"

Sue Murphy

Sue Murphy has a broad range of classroom experience. Having taught school 38½ years, she began teaching French, Speech and English at MPHS in 1963. In addition, she taught Social Studies and English at West Intermediate. Furthermore, Sue has taught all grades and subjects in every elementary building in the Mt. Pleasant School District. She also taught 2 years in Coleman, Michigan.

Sue's advice to teachers today is to continue their dedication to children, maintain a high work ethic and, most importantly, enjoy what they do! She feels that teachers must maintain a balance in life between work and play.

Upon retiring, Sue has no commitments for future plans. She will look forward and take one day at a time, following her late mother's advice. Sue also hopes to make time for opportunities to reconnect with friends.

Donna Parr

Donna has been teaching at Pullen Elementary for the last four years, but she started her teaching career in Vermont in 1966. They moved to Mt. Pleasant the next year where she taught in Rosebush. Then a move to Colorado to teach for a year while her husband finished his schooling. It was back to Mt. Pleasant and Fancher Elementary. Donna took several years off to raise two sons and has been teaching for the last 14 years in the Title 1 program.

Donna's love of teaching is "all about the kids". She has encouraged and taught children to read. She has

also instilled in students how important “being the best you can be” is to their future development. What great success stories she has to tell!

Donna has great retirement plans including the birth of a first grandchild, gardening, reading, and enjoying the freedom of time. We wish Donna the best!!

Pat Seiter

Pat's teaching career started in Ohio where she taught at Defiance High School and Bowling Green Senior High. She came to Mt. Pleasant High School in 1976 and taught here ever since. Pat taught in the English department until moving into the Media Center in 1995. Pat, her husband Richard and cat Foxy, are moving to St. Augustine, Florida on June 13 to be closer to daughters Molly and Jennifer. They are both looking forward to a new adventure which included buying a house online in November! Pat has registered to teach in Florida but assures us that she “will not sub!” We wish her all the best!

Ellie Smith

Ellie is completing her 21st year of teaching. She says, “I have been blessed by working with outstanding staff at every building I have worked in. I began teaching Developmental Kindergarten at Kinney School and later we were moved to Mission Creek. From Mission Creek I went to Fancher School Kindergarten and enjoyed the PERFECT Kindergarten room while there. After reconfiguration, I moved with many of my Fancher friends to Vowles Elementary and have totally enjoyed the staff, students and families there.

We all know how much each individual teacher puts into his/her teaching career and I want to thank each and every individual with whom I have worked over these past 18 years in the Mt. Pleasant School System. Every teacher I have worked with gives so much of themselves to their students and parents and the district. I just want to say how appreciative I am to have had the opportunity to work with such wonderful people. I will miss you.

I am looking forward to retirement and spending time with my family and retired friends. Knowing that I will miss my teaching friends and students, I'm sure I will be keeping in close contact with you in the years to come. God Bless!”

Bill Wood

Bill Wood has taught Graphic Arts for 33 years in the Mt. Pleasant Area Tech Center. He says, “the good thing about teaching in this area is the tremendous changes in the graphics area over the last 33 years. Between learning each new skill required in the area and the advent of many new computer programs both in the prepress and post press areas made the time pass so fast. The only constants have been the high quality of support staff and teachers, plus the support of the administration. I feel very fortunate to have been in vocational education during the 72 to 2000 period. I think it has been the golden age of modern technical education.”

He plans on many more years of learning and observing the world around him “with that smart, cute gal that I talked into marrying me, Sandi Larson-Wood.”

From The President

I want to thank everyone who made attending our General Membership meeting a priority in April and who have followed through by contacting their legislators.. It is important that we continue to deliver the message and recruit allies from outside the education community. Other than ratification meetings, I cannot recall a GM with this kind of rank and file support. Vowles teachers won the Doozie dollars for the highest percentage of members in attendance with 100%.

We know what we do. We know how important it is. We know that not just anyone can be a teacher. We know that teachers make a difference. We know that while we are still getting good people to come into our profession, they aren't coming in the numbers they were a few years ago.

It was a bit depressing, when, in a room with over 180 teachers, not one hand went up when you were asked, “Would recommend to your best and brightest students that they consider a career in education?” What does that say about what has happened to our profession?

It's time for us to take this personally. When the state legislature decides that they can cut our benefits, they are saying they don't think we earn what we are paid. That is wrong. It is not acceptable, and **we need to stand up and tell everyone we know that we deserve what we get paid!** I have no reservations about telling people, “There are very few people who can do, with a group of young adults, what I can.” National research indicates that Americans hold teachers in high regard, and they particularly give high grades for credibility to their own children's teachers. If this is an assault on a faceless organization, we lose. If we make it clear it is an assault on each of us as individuals who live and work with the other members of our community, we can win the public over.

If you listened carefully to Mr. Caul, he told us he thought benefits should be decided at the local bargaining table which is good to hear, but when speaking about SB 55 and 56, he said he would not support them “in the form they are in now.” That is an important qualification and we need to tell him via mail, and email, that we expect him to oppose any form of state takeover.

It was great to have the turnout at the meeting. We had a good session with Mr. Caul and we are armed with the information we need to fight this battle. All that is left now is to get out and do it. It is a battle that will not go away. We will need to fight it over and over, and when we think we have won, our enemies will come back and try again. They are convinced that if they fight long enough, they will wear us down. We can't let that happen.

School funding focus of June 21 K-16 rally in Lansing



Ellie Smith, Vowles Kindergarten teacher, presents a book to an incoming kindergartner during Mt. Pleasant Public Schools' Kindergarten Roundup.

Colleagues, did you know?

As an annual PR effort, MPEA members give the "gift of reading" to prospective kindergartners during MPPS' roundup process. This year we provided a free book to 206 children. This is the largest number of gift books MPEA has distributed during roundup in a number of years.

Hats off to MPEA members participating in the round-up process: all our kindergarten staff, all our speech and language pathologists, and our Title I Parent Involvement Coordinator. And, thanks to all MPEA members who advocated for an all day/every day program and who share the good news around the community that we have an excellent kindergarten program and a great staff!



MEA members are encouraged to join parents, community leaders and concerned citizens at the K-16 Coalition for Michigan's Future rally at the Capitol in Lansing on Tuesday, June 21, to urge legislators to keep their promise to adequately fund our public schools, community colleges and universities."Fund education NOW!" by supporting Senate Bill 246 and House Bill 4582 will be the rally cry to legislators, who can prove that education is their top priority by supporting the companion bills.S.B. 246 and H.B. 4582 call for minimum yearly increases in state budgets for K-12 schools, community colleges and universities. The minimum funding increase would be based on the rate of inflation or 5 percent—whichever is less. The bills' provisions would take effect in the 2005-06 school year.The passage of S.B. 246 and H.B. 4582 would provide enough money for schools to give all students a quality education and would eliminate the need for school employees to continue battling attacks on their salaries and benefits in difficult economic times.Education has been hard hit during the current economic downturn. Since 2002, the state has cut \$490 million from K-12 school funding. In 2003-04, Michigan's 29 public community colleges lost more than \$18 million in state funding, while from December 2002 to December 2003, Michigan's 15 public universities lost \$240 million.Cuts in school programs and staffs brought on by inadequate funding ultimately will rob our children of a successful future. Schools can't keep absorbing cuts while their costs keep increasing. Unfunded mandates like No Child Left Behind coupled with the rising costs of running a school district are keeping money from reaching classrooms to provide a quality education for students.Plan to attend the June 21 rally. Remember, the rally's focus is school funding—NOT school employees' health insurance or MESSA.Registration begins at noon at the Lansing Center. Pre-rally events begin at 1 p.m. with the march to the Capitol for the rally at 2 p.m. Go to www.michigank16.org for details and pre-registration.

New Mackinac Center Study: Michigan School Employees Have Sacrificed Pay to Protect Quality Benefits

Study shows Michigan pay and benefit increase is below national average

LANSING, Mich. — Combined spending on wages, salaries and benefits for Michigan school employees increased less than the national average between 1992 and 2002, shows a study released today by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

A flaw in the study could bring Michigan's rate even further below the national average. In response to a question at a briefing Thursday, the study's author, Kirk Johnson, an adjunct scholar with the Heritage Foundation, admitted that the study is flawed because he did not account for the shift in retirement costs from the state to school districts in 1994 as a result of Proposal A.

Even including the flawed data, the study, "Rising Employee Benefits Costs in Michigan Public School Districts," shows that Michigan school employees received far less in pay increases than school employees nationwide between 1992 and 2002 (18 percent in Michigan versus 34 percent nationwide). The study clearly shows that Michigan school employees sacrificed pay increases to pay for quality health care benefits.

According to the study, combined spending on wages, salaries and benefits for school employees nationwide increased on average by 34.6 percent, compared to 34.5* percent in Michigan from 1992 to 2002. (*Note: The 34.5 percent figure is inflated because the study failed to factor in the addition of pension costs to school district budgets in 1994. Before 1994, the State of Michigan paid school employee retirement costs directly to the retirement fund. After 1994, the costs were shifted to school districts and began to appear as a new benefit cost on the U.S. Census Bureau reporting forms used as benchmark data for the Mackinac Center study. Measuring from 1992, two years before the pension benefit costs were shifted to school districts, results in a flawed and hugely inflated comparison to 2002 data, which includes pension costs.)

The new Mackinac Center study recommends ways for Michigan to reduce health care benefits for school employees, including seizing the benefits of all current school employees and moving them to a state government-run health insurance fund operated by six political appointees. That contrasts with the position the Mackinac Center took in 1992 on the sale of the Accident Fund, which at the time was a state-owned workers compensation insurer. Then, Lawrence Reed, president of the Mackinac Center strongly urged the state to stay out of the insurance business, writing: "There really is no strong case for the state to be in the insurance business. Nothing in the Constitution requires it, and experience hardly suggests that government can run a business more efficiently than private enterprise."

"The Mackinac Center study, like others before it, confirms that Michigan school employees have had to sacrifice pay raises to keep quality health care coverage. They have paid – and are paying — for the benefits," said Gary Fralick, manager of communications at MESSA (Michigan Education Special Services Association).

"This study also demonstrates that health care costs are a national challenge that requires national solutions, not state legislation like Senate Bills 55 and 56 that would eliminate collective bargaining protections for health care benefits and replace it with a state government insurance fund."

Fralick continued: "The private sector is working to serve the education insurance market. There is competition. MESSA serves about 55 percent of the market, and competitors serve the rest. School employees value MESSA because we are a not-for-profit membership organization that provides outstanding service and quality. MESSA helps school employees stay healthy, on the job and we help keep them in the profession, where they're needed to help our schools meet the challenges of educating students for the new global economy."

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