

Retiring teachers reminisce about their service

By Michaela Kennedy

Jamestown Schools will say farewell to three veteran teachers who retire this June. Susan Haskell, Patricia Cook, and Deborah Murphy offer parting words and reflect on their decades of service to multiple generations of children in the community.

Kindergarten instructor Susan Haskell started her teaching career in Jamestown as a student teacher 30 years ago. Little did Haskell realize then that she would build a lifelong career at the Melrose Avenue School. She taught third grade for nine years, and went on to spend the next 21 years teaching kindergarten. "It was a very hard decision (to retire)," she says. "I second guessed it many times."

Haskell, who also is an island resident, reveals her love of working with youngsters. "For a five-year-old, the simplest things are fascinating to them," she refers to her students as extended family. "Having your own class



Susan Haskell, Pat Cook and Debbie Murphy have combined close to a century of teaching children in Jamestown. The three are retiring at the end of the school year. Photo by Sam Bari

for a year is precious," she says. Haskell has worked closely with the parents of students, also. "I get to know the parents well."

One of the biggest changes Haskell has seen in her career has been in the last few years since computers became a regular learning tool in the classroom. When computer technology was introduced, students were fearful of the machines and needed extra guidance. With computers common at home now, children entering kindergarten display adeptness in front of the screen. "The students are obviously comfortable using a mouse," she observes.

Haskell knows she will do some kind of service work in the future. For now, she has no specific plans, except to clean 30 years of collected things out of

her classroom. "I have so much stuff that brings memories back as I clean, that I'm not able to go on to the next step right now," she said.

Patricia Cook, fifth grade instructor, taught middle school for 22 years, 16 of which were in Jamestown. Cook spent some years instructing sixth and seventh grade students, but found her niche with a younger set. "I love fifth grade," she says. "Ten- and 11-year-olds are imaginative and still willing to learn. Their creativity is not restrictive."

Cook recalls with pleasure the moments when she saw recognition on the faces of her students. "I will miss the 'ah' moments, when they get to that point of understanding," she says. "It's like jumping out of a plane."

Cook has mastered the art of reaching the 'ah' moments more often, throwing away the peripheral information to reach the heart of a learning unit. She notes her own learning curve as a teacher, and asks the question, "What is the essence of the lesson?"

In addition to students and new challenges, Cook will also miss the camaraderie of other teachers who share their daily life together. "It's a good faculty," she says.

Her only plan so far is to have the summer off. "I like to go with the moment," she adds.

Deborah Murphy of Saundertown spent 20 of her 31 years teaching first grade at Melrose Avenue. Murphy expanded her educational horizon in the summer of 2000 when she traveled to Japan on a Fulbright scholarship. Since then, she has been helping her students explore the Asian country with a learning unit she designed based on her trip. "The kids love the Japanese unit. It's a lot of fun to teach," she notes.

Murphy echoed the sentiment of the other retirees that they will miss the day-to-day camaraderie with the faculty and the family-like feeling with the students. "Jamestown is a very special place," she says. "I feel connected to everyone."

Off the Curb celebrates 15th

Off the Curb is Rhode Island's premier hip-hop dance company and they are turning 15 this month.

Off the Curb has reached thousands of young people over the past 15 years and the performance troupe has traveled to Italy, Portugal, Canada and throughout the United States. The dance company has inspired countless audiences with amazing shows and passed on the message of no drugs and no violence. They have also provided youth throughout the state the chance to dance and perform.

The troupe will be celebrating their 15-year anniversary at LOCA Restaurant in Newport on Saturday, June 30. The event will start at 7 p.m. and everyone that has supported or been a part of Off the Curb is invited to attend. Admission is \$20. For more information, call 862-0190.

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LEGAL TIP

The assumption of the risk doctrine did not bar the negligence claim of a powerlifter who alleged that he suffered injuries because the organizers of an athletic competition failed to properly instruct volunteers who "spotted" his event, a Maryland appellate court has ruled in reversing a summary judgment.

The plaintiff suffered a shattered jaw and other injuries when he failed in an attempt to bench press 530 pounds at a powerlifting competition organized by the defendants.

The plaintiff sued and the defendants claimed the plaintiff assumed the risk.

The court disagreed stating the plaintiff did not assume the risk of spotters that were not properly trained.

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