

Winter 2013

# Long Beach 908 Magazine



**Inside: 15 East Long Beach Teachers  
Who Have Been the Face of Learning Over  
the past 3 Decades!**



# Long Beach 908 Magazine

*local business, local teams, local people*

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Happy New Year from the Long Beach 908 team! We are looking forward to another year of profiling local businesses, and highlighting the interest stories that you, the people of East Long Beach care about. Be sure to check out our new Facebook page.

For this issue we interviewed the longest-tenured teacher from each elementary school in East Long Beach (of schools agreeing to participate). Part of the draw of East Long Beach's draw is quality schools and certainly the teachers who have kept them consistently high. A couple of months ago I thought of my favorite elementary school teacher from when I attended Minnie Gant, Mrs. Cantor (article on page 10). She has been teaching for 44 years and helped form the lives of hundreds of East Long Beachers. Even though I may have been 10 years old at the time, many things I learned in her 5th grade class still help me today. I knew that a little research would prove there are similarly dedicated teachers at every school in the '908. We found 15 great teachers from schools all over East Long Beach and have profiled their contributions in the following pages.

Special thanks to staff writers Halle Kohn and Adonis Voulgaris, and staff photographers Nick LaRoque and Ryan Morrison. Enjoy the issue and as always, contact us with any questions or comments.

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## ... Cubberley Elementary School

### Mrs. Wright



Mrs. Wright was raised both in Los Angeles and South Carolina. She came to Long Beach in 1973 to attend LB State, and liked the city so much that she volunteered as a teacher's aide for the school district while attending college. Hired mid-year in 1982 to teach full-time at Webster Elementary, Stephanie Wright still has the stub from her first paycheck, which came out to \$962 for a month, or less than \$12,000 for the whole year. For Mrs. Wright, however, the check was a most welcome sight. After struggling to put herself through college and complete her teaching credential – studying on long bus rides to Long Beach from LA, renting out rooms when she could, and sometimes sleeping in a camper shell parked in a driveway– that first paycheck wasn't the only thing that made her hard-earned degree worth it. She had also begun fulfilling her life's passion and purpose – school teaching. The joy she receives from being with the students and growing the seeds of learning that are implanted in each individual child's brain has not diminished after all these 30 years.

When Mrs. Wright was moved to Cubberley School in 1984, she didn't know what to expect, having never been in the northeast section of Long Beach. She drove to the campus, noting all of the pretty front yards with flowers and fences, and thought to herself, "Okay, this is going to be pretty nice." On her first day of school, she introduced herself to the custodian, Mr. Sam, another long-time Cubberley employee and friend to Mrs. Wright, who retired just last year. As of 2012, Mrs. Wright has taught every elementary grade (K-7) except for 3rd. However, in her earlier years, when she mostly taught 1st grade, it was Mr. Sam who encouraged and gave her the confidence to handle 4th grade, which is, once again, her current post. Mrs. Wright



remembers from her earlier years of teaching how poised, confident, and effective many of the experienced teachers were. Now, as the longest-tenured teacher at Cubberley, she has definitely gained that same confidence to teach any student at any grade level. Her favorite type of students are those whom others think cannot learn, because she knows that every child has the seed of learning waiting to grow, if treated by their teacher as an individual.

In 4th grade, the students learn a lot about California, Long Beach, and the mission system. The in-class demonstrations and the field trip to Knotts Berry Farm (the historical section, not the roller coasters) are kid-favorites; however, Mrs. Wright's favorite assignments are the at-home projects that she designs to promote family learning time, something that is of vital importance in today's busy, busy world.

Mrs. Wright has lived in Long Beach during all her years of teaching, and remains loyal to the city because of everything it has given her. She and Mr. Wright sent their own children through Poly High School, and she absolutely loves hearing from past students if she runs into them at a local football game, etc. From these encounters, she has realized that, although students thank her for their education, their stronger memories are usually of moments outside of academics, the more human-to-human connection. "Thanks for teaching me manners," or "Thanks for giving me the confidence to wear glasses." It's always refreshing for her to receive recognition from past students, and learn that the things she taught them have stuck. She was even invited to the wedding and baby shower of one former student.

Mrs. Wright always jokes with her students, telling them to remember her when they become rich and famous. One thing she does not joke about is when she tells her class each year, "You are the best students in Long Beach, I'm the best teacher in Long Beach, and Cubberley is the best school in Long Beach, so get ready to learn!"





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## ... *Naples Bayside Academy*

### Mrs. Bogardus and Mrs. Drago



Lynne Bogardus, born and raised in East Long Beach, attended Lakewood High, LBCC, and Chapman College before landing her first (and current) teaching position at Naples Elementary. She knew as a fourth grader at MacArthur that she wanted to be an elementary school teacher because of the joy she gained from helping her deaf sister to learn. Jennifer Drago attended Cal State Fullerton as a business major; however, she jumped careers after she realized that working with children, and the planning that goes into teaching, were what she really enjoyed. Although they took slightly different paths to the Naples School door, both women were hired – within two days of each other – in January 1991, and each has remained at the school for over 22 years.

Of course, back when they first got started, students knew Mrs. Bogardus and Mrs. Drago by their maiden names, i.e., as Miss Hetzel and Miss Mueller, respectively. Besides the big changes in their personal lives (what with getting married and starting families), much about their teacher-lives has changed as well. In 1991, Naples School was mostly attended by students who were bussed-in from other areas in Long Beach, and the school had no uniform requirements. Over the years, however, more and more neighborhood children began coming back to the school, and the two teachers are now overwhelmed with local parent support and volunteers. In fact, they receive so much parental assistance, it allows them to focus all of their own attention to helping kids learn.



The PTA is strong, and supports the school by raising good money and necessary supplies. As Mrs. Drago puts it, “It’s like working at a small, free private school!” A favorite way to cement the home-school connection is to bring in parents who work in professions that apply material the students are learning. For example, when the children are learning in science about the human body, the teachers try to bring in a doctor to speak both about the science and the profession, including what course of study can lead to a medical degree. Both teachers attribute their success at Naples to growth in the PTA over their tenure.

One thing that has never changed in 22 years is the teamwork shared by Mrs. Drago and Mrs. Bogardus. For a while when they were first hired, the two taught 3rd grade together in the same bungalow. That was somewhat temporary, and for the last 10 years they have both taught 4th grade—in different bungalows. However, the idea of teaching together, or team-teaching, has not disappeared. Between the two of them, they teach all 4th graders at the school, and apply what they strongly believe as a family concept, that if it’s good for one kid, it’s good for all. Twice a week, the two teachers spend time in planning, figuring out what needs to change and what should stay the same. They are so much on the same page that they sometimes give their principal déjà vu when he walks from one class to the next. Often he enters the classroom of Mrs. Bogardus saying, “Hey! I swear I just heard that sentence next door!” On certain projects, the teachers squeeze all of the students into one classroom and jointly





teach the lesson together – just like in the old days. Because they are in 4th grade, students always look forward to, and later remember, the big “Mission Project.” The teachers have learned to maximize student involvement by having them build their missions in small groups at school; they minimize the messiness by doing the building outside. Another project beloved by the students is when they “Bring California to Life.” Mrs. Bogardus and Mrs. Drago assign each student a term that has to do with California, such as “Volcano” or “Gold,” and the student completes a full report on the key term, including dressing up as the word on which they have become an expert. The teachers take pride in teaching their 4th grade students the steps



required to write a real research paper, including bibliography.

Mrs. Bogardus and Mrs. Drago absolutely love their school, the kids, and the parents. After 22 years, they don’t plan on leaving anytime soon. Naples is like a family, where they can count on running into former students on Second Street and hearing what they are doing with their lives. As for Mrs. Bogardus and Mrs. Drago, future students can expect them to continue on as the same upbeat and teamwork-oriented duo, running the show in 4th grade at Naples.

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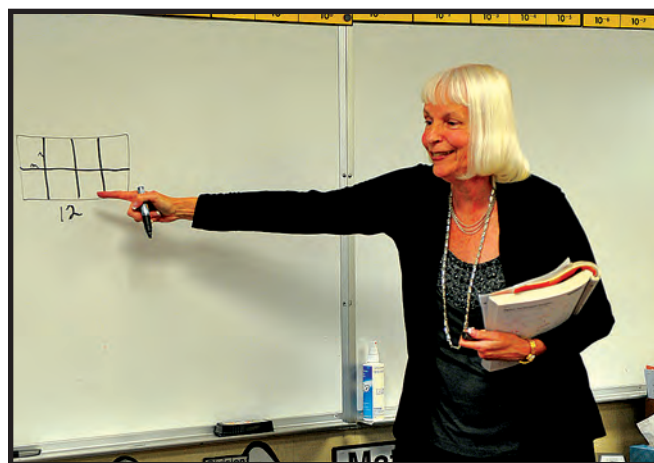
## ...Minnie Gant Elementary School

### Mrs. Cantor



Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Barbara Cantor attended the city's Duquesne University, at the time a small college. Upon graduating in 1968, she began teaching at an elementary school in her hometown. A year later, after her husband was offered a job in Southern California, the young wife blindly applied to school districts in what was to be her new home clear across the country. She was hired—over the phone—for the fall semester of 1969 to teach at Minnie Gant Elementary in Long Beach. Now, 44 years later, Mrs. Cantor has raised a family, changed grade levels five times, and gone back to earn a master's degree attending night school, but her yearly dedication to the children attending Minnie Gant remains the same.

One of the constants Mrs. Cantor has maintained throughout her teaching career is the putting-on of a class play. Indeed for the past 30-or-so years, Mrs. Cantor's students have enacted unique musicals, many written by their talented teacher! Mrs. Cantor presents the option of putting on a play to her class as their reward for working hard all year, which allows them the "luxury" of spending two exciting weeks in learning lines, rehearsing, and finally performing in front of the whole school. The amazing thing is that Mrs. Cantor has only repeated a play twice in all her years of teaching. Therefore, she is able to identify any former student by the role they played when in her class. It is quite remarkable that, despite all of the students she has taught, one need only remind Mrs. Cantor of some long-past play, by which cue she can remember all of the class and the parts they played.



Mrs. Cantor has seen technology change so much of education; it's amazing to have instant access to all of the information on the Web, e.g., to provide answers to student questions. Although she employs many newer resources on a regular basis, presenting lessons using PowerPoint, and showing examples through a document reader rather than an overhead projector, many of Mrs. Cantor's projects and teaching techniques have remained the same. For example, concepts in arithmetic like integers and fractions haven't changed; and for U.S. history Mrs. Cantor's students every year complete a President project. Often, at the end of a day, you can find Mrs. Cantor playing piano while her class sings campfire songs as a reward for finishing their work. Current events are also an area of emphasis. "When I was in school I remember the kids always bringing up the news and I had no idea what they were talking about!" Mrs. Cantor promised herself she would make sure every child in her class could keep up with current events conversations.

Mrs. Cantor has nothing but positive things to say about Minnie Gant students. She says that every school term, even though she may get one year older, the children remain the same—a polite, honest, eager-to-learn, and energetic bunch. For that reason—in anticipation of meeting her new class—Mrs. Cantor gets antsy every summer awaiting the start of the new school year. She just absolutely loves what she does! She never gets tired of former students—whether in high school, or fully-grown adults dropping their own children off at Minnie Gant—visiting to tell her what and how well they are doing. A couple of years ago a grown man came walking up to her bungalow and said, "Mrs. Cantor, I was in your very first class ever. Do you remember me?" She absolutely did. His name was Mike, and he was in the red reading group.



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## ... Carver Elementary School

### Mrs. Dowlen



Lynda Dowlen is a local through and through. She attended Lakewood High School and graduated from CSULB. Thirty years ago, she began teaching at Naples Elementary school right out of college before switching to Bret Harte for a brief stint, then onto Carver where she has been for almost 20 years. Mrs. Dowlen is quick to brag about her school and the other teachers at Carver. Her reasons for bragging include high-test scores, involved parents, and long-time teachers – most of whom are also local. She estimates at least half live in the '908.

Mrs. Dowlen fits the Carver archetype as well as anyone: she lives within walking distance of the school, and her daughter attended Carver and Millikan. Mrs. Dowlen's strength as a teacher is evidenced by her natural touch with students – she concentrates on promoting self-esteem, and everything she does is built upon her strong belief that every student can thrive and succeed in a positive learning environment. The key is to teach students to enjoy reading and learning—and not to make it a chore. She is also popular and well-respected by parents, which is probably the secret to her success in getting them involved and committed.



Mrs. Dowlen describes her teaching method as cross-curricular. She likes to teach every subject in cohesion with the lesson unit. She keeps the day exciting by having students sing songs, such as the Star Spangled Banner – patriotism is an emphasis in her first grade classroom. She also believes in rewarding kids for their hard work through fun activities.

Besides teaching, Mrs. Dowlen loves life in East Long Beach, and actively engages in the community. She supports many local businesses, and is a friend with many of the owners. She even used to run a small LB business herself in the 1990's. When her daughter was in 2nd grade, Mrs. Dowlen temporarily (for 5 years) switched to part-time teaching, and started a children's clothing shop near the traffic circle called Small Fries. She laughs at how many people still approach her in the grocery store, having recognized her as the "Small Fries Lady." Her business venture is no surprise given her passion for children and local business.

For now Mrs. Dowlen has become quite comfortable teaching at Carver. She loves the students and the parents as much as they love her. Her daughter is grown and lives close by, and her husband is a teacher as well at Dana Middle School in San Pedro. Mrs. Dowlen stresses the importance of a positive learning environment every day.



## ...Details, Details, Details

### Naples Island Car Wash and Detail



Naples Rib Company owner, Dave Ursini, purchased Naples Island Car Wash and Detail in May 2011, and pledged to keep top-notch employees and first class quality in all aspects of the business. With 5 full-time employees (each having over 7 years experience with the company), and another 7 part-timers, the hard work and pride invested in each carwash results in customer care and quality that should be fundamental in this line of service.

Since under new ownership, the car wash's preferred customer list has grown steadily over the last year and a half to a high percentage of satisfied customers. The recent success in satisfaction is directly related to the idea of a 100% Hand Wash. Customers are always dealing with real people, and because there are no machines, any individual wash is easily tailored to the needs of a customer.

At Naples Island, a wax means a wax – not some cheap “mock wax” substitute. If you order the full detail specialty, the Naples team cleans your entire car until they are assured you will not be disappointed. Adelberto, the long time head-detailer, explains that unless there is something physically wrong with your car, the full detail will make it look absolutely brand new. This striving for satisfied customers extends to every aspect of the car wash experience, earning the “Naples staple” a faithful set of long-term East Long Beach customers.

Probably the biggest thing that sets Naples Car Wash apart from its competitors is Ursini's pledge to always have a manager on site to communicate with customers. As Dave



knows, a unique situation may arise with each individual car, and it is vital that the on-site manager be available to address customers' concerns immediately and effectively. Managers Jonny, Jerry, and Phil fit the bill, making sure that everything runs smoothly, and every customer leaves satisfied – both with the condition of his/her vehicle and the overall experience. Dave's office at the restaurant overlooks the carwash and he is readily available if ever needed.

Naples Car Wash rewards loyal customers through its free computerized membership program – the more car washes and details you buy the more you get for free. Expect a detail job to take about 4 hours, and a car wash to last around 30 minutes. Luckily, the lunch window at Naples Rib Company faces the waiting area, where one can enjoy a delicious sandwich, which makes the time pass quickly!





## ... *St. Maria Goretti Catholic School*

### Miss Villarín



Angela Villarín, 1st grade teacher at St. Maria Goretti, went through a long journey before arriving in Long Beach to teach our 6-year-olds the best handwriting form in the country! She was born in the Philippines where she attended a French University called St. Paul's, teaching first grade as a way to finance her education. In 1968, she was asked by a Jesuit priest to move to Chicago and teach at St. Mary's Assumption Byzantine Catholic School. She taught there for 18 years, then one year in Pennsylvania, before Bishop Kuzma in Anaheim recruited her to teach at St. Maria Goretti in California. Her mother and brother, who had moved to California in the meantime, were delighted to have her join them in Long Beach.

The community at St. Maria Goretti is certainly glad that she moved here as well. For the last 24 years, Miss Villarín has been showing her love and compassion to the 1st graders at the school on Palo Verde, creating a happy, happy environment, and opening wide the doors of faith for the students. Upon entering her class one immediately sees the children singing and smiling, laughing at the many jokes told by their beloved teacher. As one student explains, "Miss Villarín is funny. She is nice too." For Miss Villarín, the happier her students are, the better she is doing, and that is how she strives to teach.



Almost every summer vacation, outside the time committed to helping the sick at local hospitals, Miss Villarín goes to Europe. She loves visiting Italy, France, and Russia, snapping photos of religious, historical, and artistic treasures to share with her students and family. Her classroom walls are filled with first-hand, pictorial accounts of places like the Vatican and examples of Russian architecture. Their vicarious experience of her travels is one of the many ways by which Miss Villarín keeps her students wide-eyed and focused.

While she loves to teach reading and math skills, Miss Villarín is most proud of her students' handwriting. Her students write neatly and form every letter correctly, building a life-long habit that will always improve their chances of being hired and/or getting their message across.

Miss Villarín is very active about staying in touch with past students. Often, high schoolers will return to her classroom to perform Christian Service hours – and some continue volunteering on a regular basis long-past their HS years – a testament to their love for Miss Villarín and fond memories at St. Maria Goretti School. Miss Villarín also keeps yearbooks of her students all the way back to when she first taught in the Philippines, and she knows what many are doing now that they are all grown up. As she flips through a yearbook, her face alit with memories, Miss Villarín comments, "Oh, she's a doctor and her brother's a doctor, and oh he is a screenwriter ..." It is no wonder that so many of her former students are successful after receiving the positive foundation that Miss Villarín sets for them in 1st grade.



## ... St. Cornelius Catholic School

### Mrs. Mohr



Kerri Mohr was substitute teaching in Garden Grove when her two children began attending kindergarten at St. Cornelius on Bellflower in 1999. When the first grade teacher at Cornelius moved that year, the principal, knowing that Mrs. Mohr was subbing at the time, asked her to fill in at the first grade post. Well, she has been there ever since, and loves teaching at St. Cornelius for the same reason she selected the school for her children in the first place. Between the parish, the school, and the neighborhood, the community engenders a huge family feeling, where everyone watches out for each other's children and safety.

Mrs. Mohr did not always plan to be a teacher; however, it wasn't a huge shock to find her calling in that profession. Both parents were principals, and her husband, a high school teacher, has six of eight siblings who are teachers—family gatherings proceed via bell schedules. Mrs. Mohr went to Cal State Northridge and then LMU for her Master's.



As the first grade teacher at St. Cornelius, one of the cool programs she oversees is the 8th grade-1st grade prayer partners. Each 1st grade student in Mrs. Mohr's class gets paired up with an 8th grade buddy, attending mass together on Fridays. This buddy system helps the 1st graders get acclimated to the school in a variety of ways. Mrs. Mohr says that 8th graders will often take the time to visit with her students during lunchtime; they also do activities together (in advance of Christmas, they decorated cookies for donation to the sick), and sometimes the 8th graders even help the first graders with writing and editing.

For Mrs. Mohr, teaching students how to read and write is one of the most satisfying rewards of serving in the 1st grade classroom. "So much is covered at this level," she explains. Besides grounding the kids in the fundamentals of reading and writing and progressing them to chapter book literacy, Mrs. Mohr takes pride in teaching independence. "The year you learn how to read really marks the time when kids are able to become independent learners." Mrs. Mohr taught both of her children when they went through St. Cornelius, and they are now in college. In the meantime, Mom (Mrs. Mohr) still thrives in her 1st grade classroom, blending the family atmosphere with the beginnings of independence.



## *...Providing Quality Entertainment* **GO-FAME Youth Theatre Company**



There is a growing non-profit children's theatre called GO-FAME, located in the Long Beach Towne Center, that has captured the essence of community in East Long Beach. What started as two moms helping to put on a school play has snowballed into one of the most impressive extra-curricular programs in the city. With an age range from eight to eighteen participating in the program, the directors keep but one goal in mind: Produce truly entertaining shows that the general public will want to watch, not just parents whose children are enrolled in the program. This goal was certainly met at November's production of *Beauty and the Beast*, as the captivated audience – many of them (like me) without a child in the show – led a standing ovation after the finale.

It all started back in 2004 when Kathy McGuire and Elaine Zofrea – then Minnie Gant moms and now GO-FAME directors – watched their children participate in a professional production with South Coast Chorale at the Carpenter Center. Although thrilled with the opportunity their kids enjoyed working in a Big Stage production, Kathy and Elaine soon realized that the adult professional company wasn't ideally geared toward letting children reach their full potential as actors. Having experienced their own kids' excitement for acting, the two moms were inspired to put on a similarly professional production working with Minnie Gant students themselves. After a few months of afterschool learning and rehearsing, the full-scale production of *Alice in Wonderland*,

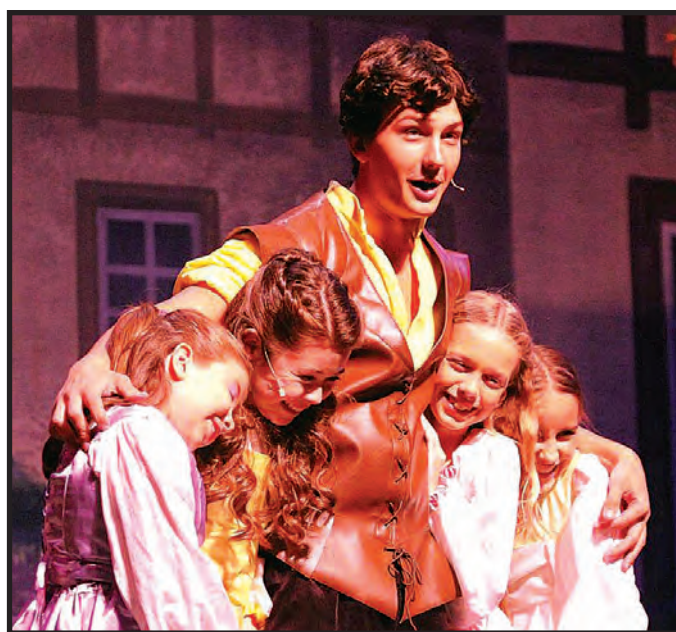
featuring 55 students, first through fifth grade, wowed everyone who saw it—even the directors.

Two things happened in the weeks that followed that original show. First, the principal noticed that kids from multiple grades were suddenly hanging out with one another at recess, having become friends during play rehearsal. And second, students kept running up to Kathy and Elaine after school to ask, "When's our next show?" Thus, the beginnings of a children's theatre group in Long Beach formed.

Kathy and Elaine realized that with their backgrounds—Kathy an applied math major with business experience, and Elaine, a theatre major who works in production at Disney—they could actually keep a children's theatre running. GO-FAME now puts on four major performances a year, works with hundreds of kids from over 20 local schools, and manages to keep its vision of providing true entertainment to the East Long Beach community always at the forefront.

Children who take advantage of this local treasure find they get much more out of GO-FAME than they at first expect. For several weeks, the young actors and actresses spend productive afternoons at GO-FAME's studio theatre, where they work on learning lines, stage directions, songs, choreography, and many other aspects of musical theatre.





Maile, aged eleven, says, “At the end of the show, I like the applause because it feels like a great accomplishment.” That sense of accomplishment builds self-confidence and reinforces the lesson that hard work pays off. Elaine too notices the “magical something” when the children step onto the real stage. “The energy kicks in, and they raise the bar high for themselves,” says the artistic director.

Watch a production by GO-FAME kids, and it is clear that the high school aged actors take pride in setting a good example for the rest of the cast, and that every child in the play is dedicated to showing off what they have learned. The cast members seamlessly move through the multiple levels of sets on the stage, swap microphones, and time their jokes to perfection. The audience is able to feel the real emotions of the musical, and it is impossible not to smile as the final scene resolves.

Watching the fall production of *Beauty and the Beast*, or any other GO-FAME show, is a way to experience the ultimate range of talent throughout East Long Beach – for the contributions of the community do not stop with the elementary, middle school, and high school participants. Part of the organization’s requirements involves mandatory parental contributions; and a lot of the fun for Elaine

and Kathy is seeing the pride that parents take in their roles in putting on productions: as set builders, costume makers, prop acquisitions, carpentry, etc. The parents often give more time than they are obligated, because they end up enjoying learning about the theatre production business as much as the kids do.

GO-FAME partners with a number of other local organizations including Long Beach Shakespeare, Coachart, LBUSD, and a number of home school organizations that all share the desire to see young people thrive in the performing arts. Alicia, a 16-year-old at Millikan who has been going to GO-FAME since she was in 2nd grade, views the experience as invaluable. “I keep coming back because every time I meet new people, have a lot of fun, and grow as an actor.” Alicia has been in 12 shows with GO-FAME and acknowledges how exciting it is to see everything she learns about acting and theatre coming to fruition during performances. Her very favorite part, however, is “Definitely the rehearsal process. The people you meet and the friends you make are even more valuable than the final product.” That’s an impressive compliment given the high standards of performance audiences have come to expect from GO-FAME productions.

## ... *Tincher Elementary School*

### **Mrs. Myrick and Mr. Schugt**



Edmee Myrick and Tim Schugt are a dynamic duo who share their passion for teaching with the 1st and 2nd graders at Tincher Elementary School in East Long Beach. Both started teaching at Tincher 23 years ago—Mrs. Myrick as a student teacher and Mr. Schugt as a regular substitute. Now as they run their coordinated 1st and 2nd grade classes, it's obvious that these two have an inseparable bond. In fact, students sometimes jokingly refer to Mr. Schugt as Mrs. Myrick's husband!

Before teaching, Mr. Schugt worked in industry. He fondly recalls his 3rd grade teacher, who he says inspired him to switch careers and become a teacher. When he first started working in education, things were a lot different than they are now. He jokingly romanticizes his earlier days teaching over twenty years ago. "I wonder if my student teacher will have any good ol' days," Mr. Schugt muses. Something that hasn't changed during Mr. Schugt's tenure is the desire of every teacher to do what is best for their students—"even if it means something has to come out of our own pockets," he expresses. "You do what needs to be done," referring to his willingness to go the extra mile for his students.



Mr. Schugt taught 5th grade at the start of his teaching career, and then moved to 8th grade before facilitating the middle school technology lab. Currently he teaches 2nd grade and loves every minute of it.

Twenty-four is pretty young to be starting a real, lasting career, but Mrs. Myrick knew that teaching was her life's calling ever since the 4th grade. When asked why she loves her job so much, Mrs. Myrick replied, "[My students] come to class all sunny and happy. It makes me feel that." Not every moment is so idyllic, though—Mrs. Myrick has some funny teaching stories, as is to be expected after 23 years of the job. She recalls a class project for which her class kept praying mantis eggs in cheese-cloth. One day the cloth was suddenly dropped and the eggs broke completely open. As if human children aren't enough!

Mrs. Myrick's favorite subject to teach is math—the kind of math that's applicable to everyday life, like how to tell time, read clocks, and count coins. She explains that Tincher Elementary School also has a focus on fitness, doing things with kids that are not only fun but good





for them as well. In recent years Mrs. Myrick and other Tinchier teachers have taken over full responsibility for PE, along with their usual academic curriculum. It is a fun addition to her teaching day, getting outside and to see the students perform in a new arena for a couple of hours each week.

It's clear that there's something great about having a long history at the same school. Both teachers agree that



one of the best perks of their job is the relationship established with their students, student families, and colleagues. "Students get to know you and trust you," Mrs. Myrick explains, mentioning how students continue to visit her after they move on to the next grades, and even after they've graduated. She has also had a former student visit her after beginning a career in the military. "It's the best job ever, it really is," she says. "I'll be here 'til I drop dead."



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## ... *Patrick Henry Elementary School*

### **Mrs. Padilla**



Upon entering Sylvia Padilla's 4th grade classroom, students make their admiration for Mrs. Padilla apparent: "She's a great teacher," one girl says excitedly.

Mrs. Padilla has now been an educator for two decades, including 13 years teaching kindergarten and four years teaching 4th grade. Her inspiration to teach was born not only from her natural love and respect for learning, but in large part from a negative experience she remembers during her own 4th grade year, one she never wants another young person to endure.

Music and the arts are among the subjects that Mrs. Padilla most enjoys teaching. She strongly believes in a person's ability to improve, and insists that art teaches students about who they are as people, helping to illuminate their ability to grow. Patrick Henry School hosts musical theatre as well as dance groups; and Mrs. Padilla strongly encourages her students to participate in these offerings and performances, many of which she helps to organize.

Like most teachers, Mrs. Padilla derives joy from seeing her students' shining faces every day. She also admires the, "Ah! Now I get it!" expression – that exciting moment when a child has just realized he truly understands the material, and she loves to communicate a child's potential to his/her parents. She knows that Patrick Henry alumni have gone on to become filmmakers, doctors, musicians, and more. The school has even set up a Facebook page by means of which school alumni keep in touch.



Although Mrs. Padilla began her work in education at Patrick Henry Elementary, it was not as a teacher. First as a parent and school secretary, Mrs. Padilla was involved 25 years ago in starting a program, 2-way Spanish Bilingual Immersion, that is now very integrated into Patrick Henry Elementary School. Small at first (enrolling only 55 students), it has now grown to include 800 students at four campuses in the LBUSD.

The AP exam pass-rate among Patrick Henry 8th graders is impressive: 62.9% of students who took the Spanish AP test last year (and mind you, this is a test meant for high school students) passed with a score of 3 or higher. "We want the students to be bilingual and proud," Mrs. Padilla says. "It's good for everybody, not just some." Nor is the program's success limited to Patrick Henry - the California pass rate last year was 64.5% and the global pass rate was 61%.

In August 2012, Ms. Padilla (a 2005 Los Angeles County Teacher of the Year) was among 10 teachers honored at the White House by the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence. In accepting the award, Ms. Padilla acknowledged her colleagues who "work with and challenge me to always strive for more."

Mrs. Padilla attended LBCC and CSULB, earning Bachelor's and Master's degrees. She always enjoys seeing current and former students - and/or their parents - around Long Beach: whether as neighbors, fellow churchgoers, or just at the local market. "It's a pretty cool place to be," she says. "I don't take that for granted at all."





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## ... Prisk Elementary School

### Mrs. Koerner and Mrs. Khoury



Kim Koerner is in her 23rd year teaching at Prisk Elementary. She began her career as an educator in 1983 at what was then Sutter Academy, now Dooley Elementary School. She then moved to CIS, which is a totally unique, subject-driven school where she instructed grades 4 through 6. At Prisk since 1991, she currently teaches 1st grade, but has in the past taught 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 6th grades. Raised in Lakewood, she grew up as a local—graduating from Lakewood High School. “There’s something special about Long Beach, both with teaching and community,” she says.

Anyone who has walked into Room 28 at Prisk Elementary can tell you that “Koernerville” is more than a classroom; it is a beehive of activity and learning! Every year, Mrs. Koerner’s learners enter a room filled with decorations of every bumblebee imaginable, and the students learn to cooperate and work together just like the worker bees in a single hive. Mrs. Koerner creates this cohesive learning community by putting together fun projects and field trips to keep the children active in the material they are learning. For instance, her students learn to communicate with bees from a different hive as Mrs. Koerner coordinates a pen pal program with students from Minnie Gant Elementary. She also leads her students on a field trip to the Los Angeles Zoo in order to initiate each student’s research project on their individual mammal. Mrs. Koerner particularly enjoys visits from her past stu-



dents. She enjoys discussing their new accomplishments and hearing about how she has touched her students’ lives. She also enjoys her former worker bees’ excitement in seeing their old teddy bears. You see, at the beginning of each school year, Mrs. Koerner places a teddy at the desk of each new student, reusing the same bears each year. The children love to bond with that teddy bear—it’s an easy way to make a friend on the first day of the school year. Mrs. Koerner has also seen several former students come back to Prisk Elementary as student teachers. Probably her most famous former student, Brice Beckham, is an actor who starred in the T.V. sitcom “Mr. Belvedere,” which aired in the late 80’s.

Cathy Khoury, who attended Millikan High School—a Lakewood High rival, has spent the entirety of her 33-year career at Prisk, and in the same classroom for the past 30 years. Since she began at Prisk in 1980, Mrs. Khoury has taught 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders, but currently teaches 1st grade, which she particularly enjoys. She has always lived in one of the 908 zip codes, and expressed a great love for Long Beach and its school district. Far from growing tired of the city or her role in it, Mrs. Khoury is proud to have a part in the local history. Long Beach may appear to be a large city, but is, in reality, a very tight-knit community—and as the cliché saying goes, it really does appear to be a small world.





When asked what her favorite part of teaching is, Mrs. Khoury responded confidently, “the progression.” Mrs. Khoury enjoys seeing her students grow, not only on a long-term scale, but in the short term as well. Seeing the successes of students of the past always brings her happiness, but her greatest joy comes from seeing her students conquer the first grade curriculum and finish the year ready to become successful second graders. Mrs. Khoury is a caring woman who treats her students as if it were always the holiday season as she continually brings joy and cheer to the hearts of her remarkable first graders.



Both long-time first grade teachers agree that watching students progress and reach milestones is among the most fulfilling parts of their job. They often work together to make sure their classrooms are the best places in the world for their kids. After spending time with each of them, it is clear that their success and earned reverence from their students comes from a deep love for teaching, and a secret Mrs. Koerner shared with me. When asked what she likes best about teaching she paused, smiled, and responded, “I get back way more than I give.”

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## ... *Our Lady of Refuge Catholic School*

### Mrs. Napier



Toni Napier began working with students at Our Lady of Refuge (OLR) as a parent volunteer in 1982, while her three children attended the Catholic elementary school located at Stearns and Clark. In February of 1990, she agreed to fill in while the computer teacher first took a leave of absence, then moved into administration. At the time, the library/computer lab consisted of 12 computers available to students only in the morning. Now, 23 years later, Mrs. Napier has transformed this lab into an integral resource for every classroom, gaining for the school its reputation as being at the cutting edge of technology used in learning.

Mrs. Napier, whose official title at OLR is Vice Principal/technology coordinator, is privileged to have started at a campus that had recently received a “writing to read” grant from the Los Angeles archdiocese. This program included the donation of computers and software to schools participating in the curriculum, which emphasizes the early building of strong writing skills as a way to advance reading literacy. Over the years, Mrs. Napier trained other teachers to implement these principles, and eventually met and worked with Glenn Zawicki of Zawicki and Associates, who developed the 21st century version of the program, “Writing Starz.”

Today every teacher at all grade levels brings his or her class to Mrs. Napier’s “Writing Starz” program at least 3 times a week. The program is built around a six-station workshop set up in the computer lab, at which kids move from station to station, completing activities at their own



pace and in their own chosen order. Mrs. Napier has fine-tuned the program over the years so that students learn the skills of time management and individual work ethic, while applying lessons from the classroom to real life activities and writing research papers on applicable subjects. Mrs. Napier’s favorite part of the job is meeting extensively with teachers so that each class coming into her room for 1-2 hours per day produces work that directly applies to their classroom studies. For Mrs. Napier, “Teaching stays fun because my curriculum is always changing!”

Because OLR students are constantly being introduced to new technology (e.g., the computer lab now has a number of iPads at one learning station), privacy and safety issues are Mrs. Napier’s number one concern. The technology training includes a strong emphasis on teaching students how to handle the infinite amount of information available on the internet. Even the youngest learners are made to understand that anyone can put information onto the computer, and told they must learn to decipher between fact and opinion; trustworthy and untrustworthy. Also children are taught the importance of keeping their own information off the web. Finally, because Mrs. Napier understands that no adult can ever constantly supervise children surfing the web, she has implemented a successful procedure whereby students who run into any internet information that makes them feel uncomfortable are taught to quickly turn off the monitor and find an adult.

Mrs. Napier’s enthusiasm for teaching technology is impressive and inspiring. Here is a teacher who has consistently stayed at the forefront of changing technology for more than 20 years. She also completed a journey from parent volunteer to the educator who sees more students in a day than any other teacher at the school!



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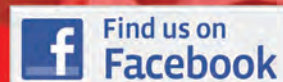


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## ... Newcomb Academy

### Mrs. Christine



Loring Christine has been teaching for over 30 years, most of them in a 3rd or 4th grade classroom at Newcomb Academy. Although she looks forward to retirement and spending more time with her grandson at the end of this year, she is infinitely thankful for all of the opportunities she's had with the LBUSD, and the memories given by her wonderfully bright and funny students – past and present. Throughout her tenure, she has striven for constancy in her goals for students—emphasizing and becoming known for coaching them through the writing of multi-paragraph essays, always accompanied by original artwork.

Though Mrs. Christine has enjoyed success with the teaching platform she created, often implementing ideas remembered from her own elementary school teachers, she has noticed quite a bit of change since she was a student growing up in Long Beach. For example, Mrs. Christine, who attended Lowell, Rogers, and Wilson before going on to USC, recalls that she never was assigned homework until she reached Junior High. She recalls those carefree days when she could “walk, skip, and jump” on her way to and from Lowell; youngsters in those days really got the chance to play outside with abandon. When it got dark, the young Loring was very self-motivated and loved to read, so she would learn



many things via books, but never because of assigned homework until she hit the 6th grade.

Now, Mrs. Christine notices the changes in playtime for kids. Homework is definitely a necessity, and course workloads have become quite hefty over the years, even for 3rd graders! Mrs. Christine assigns her students weekly homework packets in math, vocabulary, and writing, to be completed at their own pace as the week progresses. However, she also encourages the children to spend time in unorganized, creative and fun activities. “Climb a tree, skip around the house, play tag, or draw a picture,” she encourages. Mrs. Christine thinks spontaneous playtime for 3rd graders is just as important as the cursive they learn to write.

One of Mrs. Christine's favorite projects is her Picasso assignment, in which students complete research on the great artist; write an essay, which goes through multiple drafts as the young authors learn to proof and edit their work; and finally, recreate a Picasso-esque drawing, scattering the artwork with a person's eyes, nose, and mouth in the manner that Picasso may have used. The kids get a kick out of the project, which is one of the big reasons their teacher enjoys it as well.

Mrs. Christine over the years has stayed very involved with her USC sorority, Kappa Kappa Gamma. She loves volunteering with the college girls who are so smart and fun, and looks forward to continuing this involvement during retirement, so as not to fully give up on her passion, which is working with young people. She comments on her time at Newcomb very happily. The community, parents, and students make it such a good school, and she is thankful to them for making her career so special. “I am truly fortunate,” she says.



# Happy New Year!!





## ... Emerson Parkside Academy

### Mrs. Norko



Pam Norko has taught at Emerson Parkside Academy, a charter school, since 1986—a total of 26 years. This September, Mrs. Norko reached a milestone: 40 years of teaching in all. Her teaching career in the Long Beach area began at Star King Elementary off of Artesia and Long Beach Boulevard in 1979. Before coming to Southern California, Mrs. Norko taught for 6 years on the East Coast. She decided to move to Long Beach after she visited her brother one summer, who had moved here before her. “Each school has brought me new experiences,” Mrs. Norko says, reminiscing about all of the different jobs she has held in the educational field.

Mrs. Norko has taught 1st, 2nd, and 4th grades. On top of that, she has been involved in what is known as “reading recovery,” where she worked one-on-one with first graders. Mrs. Norko has also worked as a literary specialist, another position that utilized her knack for being able to help children develop language and reading skills. Currently, Mrs. Norko teaches 2nd grade, which she refers to as the “golden grade.” She raves about her students,



saying, “They’re all special in their own way,” and that every day, there’s something new.

Inspired to become an educator by her father who also worked in education, Mrs. Norko believes that her job is infinitely rewarding. After getting most of her schooling done on the East Coast, Pam went to CSULB for a year and pursued an elementary education major with an emphasis on reading and psychology.

Mrs. Norko loves teaching reading to her students because it is such an important skill that can dictate a student’s ability to learn for the rest of their lives. “The little ones are like sponges,” she says. They soak up new information like no one’s business.

She also enjoys doing seasonal projects in class, including the poetry and art students create during the holiday season. Mrs. Norko sees the fun projects as ways to spark creativity while also teaching about and carrying on traditions.

One thing Mrs. Norko is ever grateful for is that Emerson Elementary School has good parental backing and hardworking, willing volunteers. Teaching becomes much easier when everyone in the students’ lives cares about the students. She has loved all 26 years of her Emerson tenure because of Emerson’s environment. She feels lucky to be in such a great neighborhood, with great community, and awesome kids.





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