

A Job Like No Other

Kindergarten a whirlwind, fun experience

By AMY KRONENBERGER
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I never thought I would experience a job that would make a newsroom seem boring ... until I found myself in a classroom full of kindergartners.

Celina Primary School kindergarten teacher Ashley Luth graciously welcomed me into her classroom for this month's column. I've always wondered how one person can handle a room full of 5- and 6-year-olds. I don't have children myself, but I do have more than 30 nieces and nephews. I know they can be a handful to the point of overwhelming.

After spending only one morning in Luth's classroom — just a little more than three short hours — I told her I understood how she might need a hot bath and a mug of herbal tea at the end of the day. The 13-year veteran teacher laughed and replied she hardly has that option with young children at home.

It's not that the kids were unruly or difficult to manage. They actually were quite the opposite: sweet, quiet and eager to do their work. They knew their routine well and stuck to it. But Luth's effort of shepherding her 16 students through a full day's lesson plans was tiring for me just to watch. I can only imagine what it's like for her day in and day out.

One of my first questions was "how do you maintain order and keep the kids from becoming unmanageable?" She said peer pressure plays a role.

"Kids are so influenced by their peers," she said. "So when they see everyone else doing what they're supposed to do and following along, they want to do that, too."

Another key to keeping kids focused and not disruptive is keeping a set routine and quickly moving through topics to keep them interested, Luth said.

"Kids at this age level, they just naturally don't have a long attention span, so you have to constantly keep them moving and on their toes," she said. "They need lots of hands-on things, they need music, they need



Amy Kronenberger/Daily Standard

Celina Primary School kindergarten teacher Ashley Luth goes over one of the many activities she has planned for her students.

movement, so, yeah, it's constantly changing gears for them."

And constantly change gears she did. Throughout my morning visit, the kids moved seamlessly from one activity to another, one lesson to the next.

As the students filed in first thing, they immediately hung their backpacks, sat in their assigned seats and began working on a worksheet to match a word with the corresponding picture. No instruction from Luth was needed. Some of them ate their school-provided breakfasts as they worked.

They then were divided into groups, and each group spent time with Luth at the green reading table while the others worked on various activities. The schedule worked like clockwork. The kids knew just what to do, but to an outsider like me, the pace was a little intimidating.

"We call it organized chaos," Luth said, and organized chaos was exactly right.

She emphasized, though, that the chaos isn't quite so organized at the start of the school year, when the kids are first learning the routine and school rules.

A few of the kids tried to help me understand their day by showing me what they were working on. Laina taught me a dice game that required her to write a certain word depending on the number she had rolled. Tyler worked on lacing a plastic lattice mat with camouflage ribbon. This exercise came from one of several "tiny muscle tubs," with which the kids work every day to help build their fine motor skills and the mus-

cles in their hands.

In addition to the morning's small-group sessions, full group sessions covered story time, during which they learned about vegetables; exercising while counting to 100; doing the "phonics dance"; and other activities. Through it all, Luth's sharp eyes watched every child. She was quick to help, correct or refocus each one's attention. I rapidly learned a kindergarten teacher definitely has no space for tired, distracted or bad days. Every day must be 100 percent energy and full focus for the kids. All outside issues must be left at the door.

Another point both Luth and primary school principal Michelle Duncan made clear was how much kindergarten has changed since we'd been there.

"When I was in kindergarten, it was more about coloring and games, more about socialization," Luth said. "But now they expect preschool to handle that."

Kindergartners today still have fun — dancing, singing and coloring — but carefully hidden in the many projects are specifically molded lesson plans that teach them science, math, phonics and reading, reading comprehension and life skills such as respecting and helping others. Luth said the kids are more than up for the challenge.

"These kids are like sponges," she said. "Anything we throw at them, they're ready to learn."

The one thing Luth said she wishes the general public knew about being a kindergarten teacher is the kids' varying abilities when they enter school.

"Some kids are reading, some kids are writing and then you have children who ... haven't been exposed to much. So their experiences are just so different. Their levels are so different. Their home lives are so different, and we're expected to take them all to the same place and it's very challenging," she said. "And then on top of their academic needs, they have so many emotional needs. You can tell the ones who need a lot of attention."

Luth displayed an obvious affection for her students, and they reciprocated, which I found very endearing. One of them greeted her with a hug while several others eagerly told her about experiences from home. All of them clearly respected her and looked for her approval.

"You have to be able to ... make them feel safe, make them feel loved and cared for," she said. "You have to give them respect and in turn they'll respect you. All of those things have to happen before those kids are going to learn."

Luth said the worst aspect of her job is seeing a student struggle but not being able to fully help.

"The hardest part is when ... you do everything you can to help them but things are just still hard for them, when maybe there's a home life you wish you could change for them, but ... That's the hardest part," she said.

The best part is receiving hugs and smiles from the students, she said.

Her advice to anyone looking to pursue a teaching career is to stick with it on the days he or she wants to give up.

"You're definitely going to have days when you're going to question, 'is this really what I want to do?'" she said. "But those days are so few and far between and the rewards you get when you see the kids come in at the beginning of the year and how much they grow throughout the year, you can't put a price tag on that. Hang in there, stick with it and give the kids everything you have."

— Amy Kronenberger will spend time with a different professional each month, learn what he or she does and then share her experience with readers. To submit a comment or future column idea, contact Kronenberger at tc@dailystandard.com or at 419-586-2371.



Submitted photo

Midwest Electric Community Connection Fund trustee Ron Meyer, left, presents an \$800 donation to Brad Schaadt, representative of the Mercer County Emergency Response Volunteers, to buy rechargeable LED road flares.

Cooperative members give to organizations

Midwest Electric members recently donated \$16,885 to 20 west-central Ohio charities and community projects through the cooperative's Community Connection Fund.

The latest recipients are,

- Buckland Fire Department, \$2,500 to replace air pack bottles.
- St. Marys Township Fire Department, \$1,800 to buy smartpad tablets for fire trucks.
- Mercer Health, \$1,000 toward the west wing expansion project.
- YMCA of Van Wert County, \$1,000 to update handicapped accessibility to Camp Clay's swimming area.
- Village of Ohio City, \$1,000 to help renovate the community building.
- Village of Criderstown, \$1,000 to replace grills, tables and trash cans at the village park.
- Challenged Champions Equestrian Center, Ottawa, \$850 to help replace barn lighting.
- Coleman Behavioral Health, \$800 to help with new flooring for the Changing Seasons area.
- Mercer County Emergency Response Volunteers, \$800 to buy rechargeable LED road flares.
- Mercy Unlimited, Wapakoneta, \$770 for a scale pallet truck.
- Niswonger Performing Arts Center, \$750 to help offset the cost of the speaker series.
- Celina Baseball Association, \$750 to help with a new batting cage at Eastview Park.

- Wapakoneta High School English Department, \$750 to support a Great Lakes Theatre Festival guest actor/teacher.
- Family Life Center of Auglaize County, \$675 to buy supplies for the young parents program.
- Celina Community Gardens, \$500 to help with upgrades and tools for the garden.
- 4-H Camp Palmer, \$500 toward a new high ropes course.
- North Valley CYO, \$500 to support the CYO state basketball tournament held locally.
- Coldwater Schools Speech Language Therapy, \$440 for a cochlear wireless mini microphone.
- Auglaize County Fair Gospel Tent, \$400 to support performers.
- Wapakoneta High School Post Prom, \$100 to help with prizes and food.

The Midwest Electric Community Connection Fund is a voluntary charitable program. Participating members' monthly electric bills are rounded up to the next dollar, with the additional pennies deposited into the fund.

A board of trustees, composed of cooperative members and separate from the Midwest Electric Board of Trustees, oversees the application and allocation process.

Since the program started in 1998, the fund has provided \$959,683 to 798 area projects.

Individuals or organizations can apply by contacting Midwest Electric at 419-394-4110 or 800-962-3830.

Mother's Day dinner set

Celina American Legion Auxiliary members had their monthly meeting on May 1.

Prior to the meeting, a memorial service was held for all American Legion members who had died in 2016. The Celina unit lost 21 members. As each name was read, family members or a Legion member came forward and lit a candle in remembrance.

Snacks were served after the ceremony, and family members were urged to take the candle and a carnation home with them. Members try to contact as many family members as possible to take part.

Auxiliary members then hosted their meeting in a round-table format. Election of officers was held with just one position vacant. Kristy Warner agreed to run for first vice president and was elected vice.

Linda Lloyd was welcomed as a new member. The group is only four members short of reaching a goal unit, and those memberships have been sent to the department

for approval.

Checks were written and will be presented to the auxiliary's four scholarship winners during the Legion's next meeting. Receiving scholarships are Alyssa Wilkins, Lauren Fleck, Morgan Schmitmeyer and Alyssa Cisco. Schmitmeyer and Cisco are junior auxiliary members.

Members discussed plans for their upcoming Mother's Day Dinner, which is from 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. May 14 in the Legion's upstairs hall. Members will again be asked to donate salads and desserts. The public is invited.

The comedy show on April 29 was a success with lots of laughter.

Plans are being made for Poppy Days on May 19-20. Poppies are made by disabled veterans.

Members also discussed the Memorial Day services, which will be held in Mendon, at Mercer Memory Gardens and at the lake.

Andrea Garman won the bottle of wine. The meeting was adjourned until 7 p.m. June 5.

Fort Recovery FFA hosts annual awards banquet

The Fort Recovery High School FFA recently hosted its annual banquet at the middle school auditorium with more than 325 members, parents and agribusiness leaders attending.

The banquet serves as public recognition of the hard work done by the members in the past year. Fort Recovery chapter president Grace Gehle called the banquet to order. Sentinel Rick Knapke gave the invocation and the buffet meal was served. Remarks were given by superintendent Justin Firks and high school principal Marcus Overman.

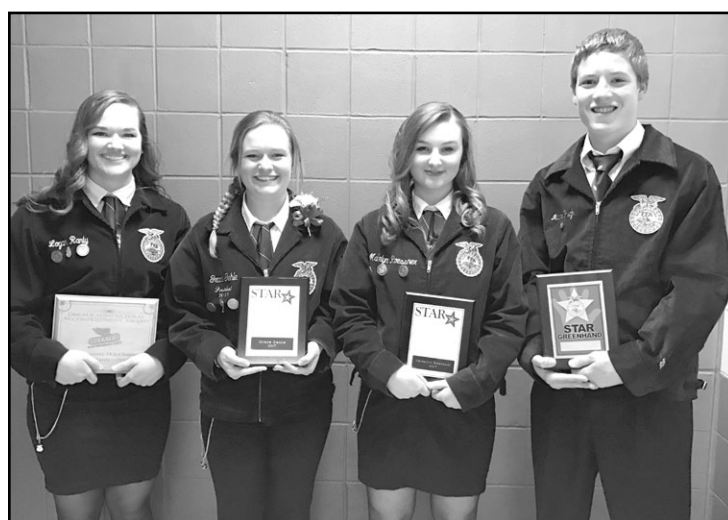
The Fort Recovery FFA has 129 members who participate in numerous events, including career development events, fundraisers and community service projects.

This year nine members will receive state FFA degrees. They are Tyler Acheson, A.J. Heitkamp, Matthew Hemmelgarn, Aaron Homan, Kristen Keller, Heather Klenke, Rick Knapke, Natalie Pottkotter and Kyle Timmerman. Five other members, Ross Homan, Kayla Knapke, Brain Lennartz, Jacob Siefing and Isaac

Siegrist, will receive their American FFA degrees. Only 0.5 percent of all members in the U.S. receive the American FFA Degree.

Many other awards were given to members for dedicated service and commitment to the chapter and all its activities. The Star in Agribusiness Award was given to Madelyn Roessner. The Star Farmer Award went to Grace Gehle. The Star Greenhand Award went to Mitchell Pugh and the Dekalb Award was given to Logan Ranly. The honorary member this year was Matt Barman, owner of Green's Quality Meats.

The chapter also hosted its annual pie auction, which raised nearly \$5,000. The proceeds each year are returned to the students to help pay for attendance at the state FFA convention, FFA camp and the national FFA convention. The pie buyers were Cooper Farms, Paul and Ginny Fort-kamp, Green's Quality Meats, K&L Tractor Sales, Ivan Kaf-fenberger, Bill Link, Jerry Schwieterman and Wayne IGA. FFA members thank the 100 individuals who also contributed to the auction and everyone who supported it in



Submitted photo

Fort Recovery High School FFA members receiving awards at the organization's recent banquet are, from left, Logan Ranly, Dekalb Award; Grace Gehle, Star Farmer Award; Madelyn Roessner, Star in Agribusiness Award; and Mitchell Pugh, Star Greenhand Award.

any way. Many area businesses donated money to support the awards program and table favors. Those businesses were Cooper Farms, DC Welders LLC, E.M.S. Body Parts & Service Inc., Fort Recovery Lumber Co., Hull Brothers, J&M Manufacturing, Kleinhenz Bros. Livestock, Larry

and Diane Keller, Lefeld Welding & Steel Supplies Inc., Mercer County Electric, Mercer Landmark, Mercer Savings Bank, Metzger Oil, Midwest Rebuilds, Miracle Lanes, Pottkotter Construction, Reinhard Dairy Products, St. Henry Tile Co., Vore's Welding & Steel and Wuebker Construction.

Local Community Action Partnership hosts May events

West Ohio Community Action Partnership is celebrating National Community Action Month in May.

Staff members say they are honored to provide essential community services. One in 6 Ohioans lives in poverty. These numbers would be worse if community action did not help people move beyond poverty. The organization is celebrat-

ing the accomplishments of staff, customers and community members who help raise awareness of the impact of community action on the lives of people who have been served.

WOCAP also has several activities planned including a fundraiser for WOCAP from 11 a.m.-7 p.m. May 18 at Chipotle on Elida Road in Lima. Customers are asked

to mention WOCAP when placing their order and 50 percent of each sale will go to the agency.

An open house is planned from noon-4 p.m. May 26 at WOCAP's Celina location, 420 N. Brandon Ave. The public is encouraged to stop by and learn which programs are available and how WOCAP serves the community. Refreshments will

be served. Stepping Stones awards also will be given that day to three individuals who have achieved self sufficiency and three WOCAP partners.

On May 31 WOCAP will host a 50/50 raffle with a \$5,000 prize. Tickets are \$10 each and available until the drawing.

For more information, call Steve Gilroy at 419-227-2586.

