

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Teaching proves to be satisfying second career

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Kathy Broderick has a master's degree in business administration and 13 years' experience at Corning Inc., mostly in managerial positions.

Based on that information, it might take some time to guess her current profession: She's a first-grade teacher at All Saints Academy, Corning.

Broderick had set out in the early 1990s for a new corporate managerial job. However, she admitted, she'd done so only half-heartedly. After a long-term substitute teaching stint at All Saints, she found her heart being pulled in another direction.

"I absolutely loved it. I knew this was what I wanted to do," Broderick said.

Though most instructors in diocesan Catholic schools have never had another line of professional work, there are notable exceptions. Corporate work, banking, nursing and even newspaper writing are among the previous careers of teachers and teaching candidates, said Sister of St. Joseph Virginia Steinwachs, who retired in July as assistant superintendent for human resources in the diocesan Department of Catholic Schools.

Elmira's Holy Family Junior High School has a total of three such teachers: Francis Whitford, who worked as a guard for the state Department of Corrections for 26 years; Karen Jennings, a former physical therapist; and Mary Jo Manning, a former registered nurse. Jennings and Manning are beginning their third years and Whitford his second at Holy Family.

Elizabeth Berliner, Holy Family principal, said these teachers are valuable commodities despite their relative lack of experience in the classroom.



Karin von Voigtlander/Photo intern

Kathy Broderick and her class march to their next activity during field day at Denison Park in Corning June 15.

"They have a lot of people experience, a lot of wisdom," Berliner said.

Jennings said her wisdom stems largely from having four boys, ages 12-18, of her own. Asked how teaching became her new career, Jennings joked, "My kids did it," explaining that she volunteered extensively and substitute taught in the Catholic schools that her children were attending. "I did so much, but I felt like I could do more," said Jennings, who teaches seventh-grade science and eighth-grade math.

Jennings already has a master's degree in education, so she said her transition into teaching was fairly smooth. Now, she remarked, she can't wait to get to the classroom.

"I have a wonderful time," she said. "My kids and the other teachers laugh at

me because I want to go to school."

Valerie Crenshaw, who teaches pre-kindergarten at Rochester's Corpus Christi School, has the same enthusiasm for her second career.

"People say that teaching must be such a stressful thing but I feel like I've been on vacation for 10 months," said Crenshaw, who is entering her second year at Corpus Christi.

Crenshaw worked in public relations at Regional Transit Service for nine years. Her attraction to teaching came from conducting seminars on behalf of RTS at Rochester schools — so many, in fact, that she became known as "The Bus Lady."

Even though she enjoyed her work for the bus company, Crenshaw said she's found numerous advantages in her new career.

"It's the flexibility you have," said Crenshaw, who has a bachelor's degree in psychology and will begin her master's program for teaching next spring. "You know (students) have to learn, but there's a variety of ways you can go about it. You don't necessarily have that in the corporate structure."

She added that in teaching "you don't have the professional airs you have to put on every day; the kids accept you for who you are."

Crenshaw said her love for her job negates the salary gap between Catholic-school teaching and many other careers.

"Honestly, I enjoy this. If I didn't I wouldn't have signed the contract. The money is definitely not a draw," she said.

Going back to the early 1980s, John Walker recalls that he decided to leave Eastman Kodak Co. after 10 years so he could teach at his alma mater, the former Cardinal Mooney High School. Although he only made one-third of his Kodak salary at Mooney, Walker calls it the best move he ever made.

"It was easy. I needed to be with kids," Walker said. "When you do something you believe in, money shouldn't be a factor and it wasn't. There were a lot of sacrifices, but I don't regret it to this day."

The Catholic high school in Greece ceased operation in 1989. But Walker has more than landed on his feet — he's the principal at Webster Thomas High School.

However, he maintained, "I'd still be at Mooney if it hadn't closed."

Meanwhile, Broderick said she was able to consider Catholic-school teaching because she has saved money over the years and her husband is still employed by Corning Inc.

"I am not like a lot of the other people that are working (in Catholic schools). Teachers out of college have a very difficult time," Broderick said. "I was fortunate."

Though Broderick noted that the potential income in other fields is "very tempting," she said that satisfaction in Catholic-school teaching goes beyond dollar signs.

"Every day is a reward, just from seeing the smiles on the kids' faces," said Broderick, who began teaching full-time at All Saints in 1994. She moved to Europe in 1997 due to her husband's job transfer, but resumed teaching at the Denison Parkway school in 2000 after the family returned to Corning.

Broderick values her fellow teachers as well, saying, "They're my friends. A lot of times in the workplace, like in a big corporation, you know a lot of people but you can't say they're your friends."

Combining her religion with her full-time job is another big plus, Broderick added: "You practice your faith. In the corporate world it was a definite struggle to try to find time for God."

Remarked Crenshaw: "That makes all the difference, when I can start a day with a prayer with my children."

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