Teacher of the Year

She is a ‘master artist’ in the classroom

Spend two minutes with Linda Carney and it is apparent she does not consider teaching a job. It’s a passion, a love and an honor – words that precisely describe the dedication and outlook of the region’s 2015 Teacher of the Year.

Carney, a math teacher at Shadle Park High School (Spokane Public Schools), was recently selected for the award, which began with a pool of nine regional nominees. As the regional winner, she now advances to the state Teacher of the Year competition, matching 10 regional finalists.

To get a sense of Carney’s depth, a recent interviewer asked her to define math – what it is and why it is important. She did not offer a Merriam-Webster definition about measures and quantities. Rather, she said, “Math is a beautiful and eloquent language used to describe the world.”

For 32 years, Carney has been teaching that eloquent language, with great success, at Shadle Park.

Her passion for teaching comes naturally. Her father was a teacher and principal and Carney says she knew from an early age that she, too, wanted to teach. Years later, as a student at Ferris High School, the inspiration of math teacher George Kersul sealed the deal, while also confirming her desire to specialize in math.

A math degree followed at Washington State University and her career launched at Shadle Park during the 1982-83 school year.

Her enthusiasm and commitment to excellence are contagious, as evidenced by the cold, hard numbers: Between 2006-2013, her Calculus AB students passed the Advanced Placement exam with an 88-percent success rate (261 tested). By contrast, the national pass rate typically hovers around 59 percent.

Last year, teaching Calculus BC for the first time, 14 students took the class and all 14 passed the AP exam with an average score of 4.4 (5 the highest).

“Watching her teach is like watching a master artist,” says Shadle Principal Eric Sylling. “She glows with the enthusiasm of a new teacher, but has the wisdom and insight of a veteran.”

“Linda is absolutely loved by her students,” adds teaching colleague Christine Allen. “She often uses the word ‘tenacious’ in her classroom. She expects her students to be tenacious and passionate about their learning and she models that every day.”

She models it so well that, in the fine tradition of George Kersul, she is now helping launch the next generation of outstanding math educators. Chris Dunn, a Shadle graduate now teaching at Rogers High School, says Carney is the reason he chose a math career.

In a world filled with labels, Carney can be identified in many ways – mathematician, mentor, master artist and purveyor of a beautiful, eloquent language. Put them all together, however, and one label fits best of all: Teacher of the Year.
Good kids today, striving to become successful adults tomorrow

In late July, on one of the frequent trips I make to the west side and back, I had conversations with two different travelers. Short conversations with each have been on my mind ever since, especially as I think about the work of our profession in the new school year.

On the flight to SeaTac I met a person who grew up and lives in Spokane as he was headed to work in Seattle for the week. He works in the health care industry and as he described his career to me, it was apparent his work is important, challenging, and that he is successful at it. I asked him where he’d gone to college to get his educational training for this significant work.

And what he said struck me. He shared he was never really a particularly good student and that, in fact, he wasn’t “book smart” (his words). Yet he noted he was able to learn on the job and work his way up, and in his early 50s his career is an unquestionable success story and his work is meaningful and needed.

His own children now out of the P-12 system, he told me he worries about education’s current push to assure every student is college and career ready, fearing that is a euphemism for college ready. He felt he may not have had the opportunity to do what he has done had things been then (in the late 1970s at a north side high school) what they are today.

And he asked me to explain why we insist that every student must achieve the same standards. Pretty good question, especially given his journey to career achievement.

On the return flight to Spokane, I met a person in his early 70s who was flying into town for business of his own. One of the questions I asked him was about his own children, and he had an interesting (and, to me, troubling) thing to say about his oldest child, an adult daughter.

He said, “she was a great kid but she is a terrible adult.” A parent of adult children myself who cannot imagine saying something like that about either of my own, I inquired why that was his perspective.

It turns out his adult daughter doesn’t share his values. She graduated from college but chooses not to work outside the home, keeps having kids (six), and her husband teaches at a community college and makes too little money.

So my understanding was that because she was “squandering” the education for which he’d paid, and was living in Florida in a socioeconomic situation that is significantly different from the one he and his wife enjoy in the Medina neighborhood of Seattle, as an adult she was somehow not the wonderful kid she’d once been.

I have continued to think about both stories. Individually and together we are entrusted with the opportunity and responsibility to provide every student in each of our schools with a meaningful education; one that might propel them to a future of their choosing that will serve them well.

We must assure multiple pathways to those futures, and we must respect that not all of them want the same thing or define success in the same way.

As a new year commences and progresses, thank you for seeing, and respecting, the uniqueness of each student in your care; for understanding and celebrating their different talents and interests; and for doing so with a long view to an outcome where they will not only be great kids today, but in fact wonderful and valued human beings into adulthood.

Whether they go to college or not, or make a lot of money or not. Where they will be able to look back and say, the education I was provided helped me become all I could and wanted to be.

Michael Dunn, Superintendent

Michael Dunn, Superintendant
Shortly after he became head softball coach at Colton High School (Colton School District), Brad Nilson made an unusual promise to his players. If they won the state championship, he would recognize the feat with a tattoo on his arm.

After dodging the bullet for a couple of years, his team brought home the state 1B title in 2009. Being a man of honor, Nilson dutifully got the tat. In the process, he also set a precedent in which every championship is now commemorated in body art.

After six consecutive state championships, Nilson is running out of arm space. The championships of 2009-2011 grace his right bicep; 2012-2014, the left.

The secrets to his success?

Nilson modestly deflects credit, saying it begins with Colton’s strong youth program that delivers him experienced, well-coached players when they enroll in high school.

That is true, but only half the story, says Colton Superintendent Nate Smith. Nilson, he says, is a disciple of fundamentals who is willing to put in the time to be successful. “He attends coaches’ clinics and is always looking for better ways to teach technique.”

He also leads by positive example. While practice makes perfect, “yelling usually leads to more mistakes,” says Nilson.

Winning invariably results from the confluence of good coaching, supportive families and talented, dedicated players. In Colton’s case, there also may be something in the water, as success is not limited to one sport or just athletics.

Coach Clark Vining’s girls’ basketball team also has won six state titles in a row; the Colton boys won state basketball and baseball crowns in 2014; and – a great source of pride to the community – the school has collected eight state academic championships in all sports since 2007.

Move over Green Bay. Colton may be the next Title Town, USA. If anyone doubts it, just ask Brad Nilson to roll up his sleeves.

**We’ve done it before; we can do it again**

When the Washington Legislature enacted House Bill 1209 in 1993, the structure of education in our state began to change.

With the onset of the state’s Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), a new assessment system was developed to monitor student progress towards meeting those requirements. The assessment developed was the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).

Fast forwarding to 2014, the WASL morphed into the High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE) and the Measurements of Student Progress (MSP). Student achievement in 2013-14 is incredibly higher than when the tests first began in the mid-1990s. Our systems became more aligned to the EALRs and student learning, as measured by the WASL, soared.

Now the system needs to change again as our state’s adoption of the College and Career Ready Common Core Standards come into fruition. Student achievement of these rigorous standards will be measured by the Standards Based Assessment Consortium (SBAC) assessment this spring.

As with the WASL, our systems will take some time to align with this assessment and it will take time for teachers and students to master the new standards.

This means SBAC scores this spring will not be as high as we all would like them to be, or as high as our MSP and HSPE scores have been. The first WASL scores were not either. However, we need to give districts, teachers and students time to adjust; give each time to align practice with what is being assessed.

History bears out the fact our students and teachers will respond very well and in short order we will see SBAC test scores increase with regularity.
Mick Miller joins NEWESD 101

An old friend has returned for a new job. Mick Miller – a long-time teacher and administrator in the Spokane, Mead and Deer Park school districts – has returned to the region as NEWESD 101’s assistant superintendent for Student Learning and Support Services.

He assumed the post in July, following four years as superintendent of Walla Walla Public Schools. His roots in the NEWESD 101 region run deep – a graduate of Shadle Park High School and Washington State University; teacher in Spokane; principal in Mead; and superintendent in Deer Park for six years.

His 31-year career also includes service as a high school principal in Western Washington’s Kelso School District.

In Walla Walla, Miller was known for his commitment to servant leadership and innovation in finding pathways for students struggling in the traditional system. Returning home, he looks forward to continuing in that tradition, assisting districts in the delivery of student-centered services. Welcome back, Mick.

New faces in Fiscal

Three new staff members have joined the NEWESD 101 team as fiscal systems managers: Kim Peters, Garrett Zumini and Lisa Piacquadio.

All three bring extensive backgrounds and experience in customer service, business management and accounting. In their new roles, they provide software support to local districts in managing fiscal/human resources. The work is expansive, covering myriad functions from payroll and accounts payable to financial statements and budget.

New fiscal trio includes, from left, Kim Peters, Garrett Zumini and Lisa Piacquadio.

Instructional staff at your service

NEWESD 101’s Center for Instructional Services has welcomed four new staff members …

Dianna Harrington, grants coordinator, who oversees a National Endowment for the Humanities history grant, the College Spark program and a federal Physical Education Program grant. She was previously employed by the Liberty School District.

Sandra Murray, regional humanities coordinator, whose varied duties include assistance to districts with implementation of Common Core State Standards/English Language Arts. She was previously employed by the West Valley School District.

Tammie Schrader, regional science coordinator, who provides professional development and assistance to districts with Next Generation Science Standards. She joins the staff after 15 years as a middle school math and science teacher in Cheney Public Schools.

Abby Spencer, regional K-4 literacy coordinator, who provides professional development and assistance to districts in bringing struggling readers to grade level. She spent the previous 11 years as an elementary teacher in Spokane Public Schools.

New superintendents: Welcome

NEWESD 101 is pleased to welcome 14 superintendents assuming new district assignments for the 2014-15 school year.

Welcome to all and congratulations on your appointments.

Columbia: Michael Young; Colville: Pete Lewis; East Valley: Tom Gresch; Keller: Mike Perry; LaCrosse: Doug Curtis; Liberty: Kyle Rydell; Medical Lake: Tim Ames; Orient: Tara Holmes; Palouse: Calvin Johnson; Republic: John Glenewinkel; St. John-Endicott: Jim Baldwin; Valley: Kevin Foster; Washtucna: Brent Seedall; Wellpinit: John Adkins.
Marathon more than a race for Cheney runners

For an Eastern Washington family competing in last fall’s Portland Marathon, the event represented much more than the usual test of athletic endurance. For this group, the marathon was more a journey than a race; a triumph of spirit, more than speed.

Meet the extended family of foster parents Aaron and Cathy Mason. Their family consists of foster daughters Britney Presson and Angela West, both students at Cheney High School; Sydney Owen, a student at Cheney Middle School; and their own biological son, Shadrach, a 2nd grader at Cheney Home Works!

Aaron, a teacher at Cheney Middle School for the last 25 years, has been involved in athletics as a competitor and coach for most of his life. A year ago, he floated an idea to get all four children involved in a common athletic pursuit – run a 26.2-mile marathon.

The specific one he recommended was the Portland Marathon – a fall event that would give the family a full nine months to train. While all of the children sported limited athletic resumes (and even more limited running experience), they were open to the idea.

After much conversation – and, the young people admit, a little hesitation – the invitation/challenge was accepted. Training began with a one-mile walk on New Year’s Day 2014, a brisk 31-degree day in Cheney.

Thus began a 674-mile training regimen that ended nine months and four days later on the muggy 85-degree streets of Portland, when all five Cheney runners crossed the finish line in hour six of the marathon.

For each runner, completing the marathon represented a personal victory – pushing oneself to do something hard; something initially thought impossible; and then doing it very well. The real story, however, wasn’t about personal bragging rights or recording the best race time. In this case, the “how and why” were more important than the “how long.” The “how” included a commitment to work through nine months of aches and pains, train in all types of nasty weather and the discipline to rise at 5 a.m. for summer training.

The “why” included a commitment up front to collect pledges for a local non-profit, Teen Closet, for every mile run. The team collected $2,700 in donations for the local group, which provides clothing to foster children.

“For foster kids who’ve often faced more adversity than success, finishing the marathon was a confidence boost like none other,” says Aaron. “It translates to the classroom and every facet of life, showing them strengths they didn’t know they had.”

Can-do spirit reigns in the Mason household. Conversation focuses more than ever on positive dreams and possibilities – and the ongoing importance of giving back to the community.

After the race, all five runners received medals commemorating their achievement – an athletic feat claimed by less than 2 percent of the population in a given year.

For most of the 6,431 runners who finished the race, their medals will forever memorialize a day of great personal achievement – a proud day in the past. For five runners from Cheney, they also inspire larger victories still to come.
Is smart collaboration possible in the new year? Let’s hope...

A new year. Generally a time of promise and hope, of possible new beginnings … resolutions for new and good habits developed; and any less positive habits rectified. An opportunity to honestly and realistically assess who and where we are in life, where we plan to go, and the best way to get there.

As 2015 dawns, our state Legislature will begin a new legislative session. The first year of the new biennial session is scheduled to be the “long one,” and it is perhaps as important a session as the Legislature has convened in many years.

I wonder how the time will be spent over 105+ days? Will our elected leaders be able to collaborate across the aisle to deliver on the McCleary decision requirement, or will they instead debate endlessly over a productive path forward or, worse, spend time advocating for more or new “reforms” to an educational system that we all work so hard to assure is one that serves our students, and their futures, well? I am hoping the former.

In recent months I have read three books that I hope some of our elected leaders might have read as well, and even more I hope they will heed the important messages of each.

In 50 Myths and Lies That Threaten America’s Public Schools – The Real Crisis in Education, Berliner and Glass (and colleagues) have thoroughly researched many (50, in fact) myths and lies that have fueled much of the reform efforts of policy makers and large foundations over the past two decades. In one chapter the authors note that we live in a 21st century world and expect our students to have 21st century skills, yet policy makers insist on continuing to assess students and their teachers with methods best suited for a 19th century model of education.

They cite companies like Google where everything from the architecture of its buildings to its staff meetings encourages collaboration, because they realize they can do bigger and better things when people work together rather than against one another. The authors wisely note, “if policy makers want to use a business model to improve education rather than merely beat up on teachers’ unions, then they should focus on the companies that are defining the future of work.”

In his book, Twenty-One Trends for the 21st Century – Out of the Trenches and Into the Future, Gary Marx describes our rapidly changing demographics in the United States, including realities that by 2043 non-Hispanic whites will make up less than 50% of our population; that beginning in 2011 those in the baby boom generation (born between 1946 and 1964) began turning 65 at the rate of 10,000 per day; and that in 2012, the oldest of the Millennials (born between 1982 and 2003) started turning 30.

He says our future will require increased personalization, creativity and ingenuity and while he acknowledges that we need assessments to help us improve education for every student and we should be accountable, “what we don’t need is a scoreboard mentality that puts education scores in the same league as football, baseball and soccer results.”

Yong Zhao, in his newest book, Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Dragon? Why China Has the Best (and worst) Education System in the World, shares that China has produced the world’s best test scores at the cost of diverse, creative and innovative talents. If our country is concerned about being overtaken by China, he says, our best solution is to avoid becoming China.

He cites a research study that says, “only 10 percent of China’s college graduates are deemed employable by multinational businesses because these students lack the very qualities our new society needs.”

His argument in this and previous books he has researched and written is that test scores are not nearly as important as many policy makers and reformers might think, and doing well on tests may not be the best path to the bright future our kids deserve.

A new year. Always a chance to recommit to a better future. Here is hoping that those we send to Olympia will work together to provide the needed funding and support our state’s students deserve, and won’t be further lured toward “reforms” that really aren’t. Thanks to all of you for the work you will continue to do to assure 2015 is one of genuine promise and accomplishment for each child you directly serve or on whose behalf you work.

Michael Dunn, Superintendent

Michael Dunn, Superintendent
Japanese students forge strong local bonds

Ask students at Seisen University in Tokyo to name three places in the United States that they have visited, want to visit, know of, or have otherwise studied in some detail.

The predictable suspects, New York and Los Angeles, may likely claim the first two spots. The identity of the third location is more elusive. Hint: It’s located in the West, but is not San Francisco, Seattle, San Diego or Portland.

Give up? It’s Inchelium, WA.

That’s not a typo.

Inchelium, 90 miles from Spokane in Ferry County – a Census-designated place; not even an official city – is a mainstay in Seisen’s international exchange program.

While a remote, unincorporated place might seem like an unlikely place to study American culture, Inchelium actually is a perfect fit for Seisen, a Catholic, liberal arts university whose undergraduate program enrolls only women.

The university’s Department of Global Citizenship Studies, the first of its kind in Japan, educates students to think as global citizens, with particular emphasis on understanding indigenous cultures around the world.

Inchelium, located on the Colville Indian Reservation, serves a student population that is 88 percent Native American. For the last seven years, the Inchelium School District has hosted 10-12 Japanese students during a three-week exchange at the start of each school year.

Inchelium teacher Denise Seeley, whose 5th grade classroom anchors the program, calls it one of the most mutually beneficial educational experiences she has ever witnessed. New language is practiced, new friendships are formed, new culture is learned, and, perhaps most importantly – close cultural similarities are identified.

While the Japanese students speak only limited English, and the Inchelium students speak no Japanese, Seeley says language differences present virtually no barrier. Similarly, despite the wide difference in age – 5th graders interacting with college sophomores and juniors – the interaction is like that of kindred spirits making natural, almost effortless, connections.

“Every year, the reaction is the same,” says Seeley. “Bonds form almost instantly; students will be holding hands in the first 30 minutes.” Cultural similarities form a strong bonding agent based on a spiritual respect for all living things.

“The Japanese students leave a strong and permanent impact most readily seen in our students’ behavior,” says Seeley. “Discipline referrals always decline while they’re here and typically remain low after they leave.”

For the Japanese students – coming from the bright lights of Tokyo, a city of 13 million people that would fit in a corner of Ferry County – the experience is similarly moving. “Most of them have never seen a dark night sky, or stars, or the Milky Way, or deer and other wildlife that we take for granted,” says Seeley. “At the end of three weeks, most of them have a hard time going home.”

But return home they do, forever changed by new friends, new culture and the awe of stars in the crisp night sky. They are forever changed by Inchelium – and Inchelium by them.
Grant puts extra PEP in their step

A year ago, when NEWESD 101 received a federal Physical Education Program (PEP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the aim wasn’t just to get students active and moving. It also was designed to get them thinking – thinking about muscle strength and endurance, flexibility, body composition and cardiorespiratory endurance.

Today, students as young as kindergarteners are old pros at explaining the multiple elements of fitness and the way various exercises promote each element. The grant, serving nearly 1,000 students in the Davenport, Odessa and Reardan-Edwall school districts, has literally transformed physical education.

With assistance from Focused Fitness, a Spokane-based company, the grant provides activities and curriculum encouraging the pursuit of active, healthy lifestyles through the school years and beyond. With the grant, the districts have incorporated technology, added exercise equipment, modified curriculum and added new assessment tools.

“Our approach is comprehensive,” says Dianna Harrington, who heads up the grant for NEWESD 101. “All of the districts have stepped up their game, embracing the highest quality physical education available.”

PE teachers Lorrie Bell (Davenport), Bruce Todd (Odessa) and Doug Hicks (Reardan) say the grant has given them capabilities and flexibility they didn’t have before – capabilities that enhance both student health and the promotion of lifelong fitness.

The teachers’ excitement about their new curriculum and equipment is exceeded only by their students’ excitement to come to the gym. In any book, that’s a win-win. Or, in this case, a win-win with extra pep in everyone’s step.

WaKIDS training: Don’t miss it

Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) is a transition process that helps ensure a successful start to the K-12 experience and connect the key adults in a child’s life. The three components of WaKIDS include:

1. Family connection; 2. Whole-child assessment; and 3. Early learning collaboration.

This year, 32 school districts in the NEWESD 101 region participated in WaKIDS. This translates to approximately 3,000 children and families throughout our region.

NEWESD 101’s Center for Early Childhood Services is the regional coordinator for this project, providing training and technical assistance to participating school districts. Upcoming trainings are scheduled February 2 and 11 in Spokane and Colville.

To register: go to http://esd101.gosignmeup.com/catalog/index.asp and click on Center for Early Childhood Services in the left column. For more information: Anne Knott, (509) 456-7086 or aknott@esd101.net.

Art show entries due in February

The region’s 42nd annual High School Art Show is just around the corner. Entries may be submitted to NEWESD 101 between February 9-20.

Award recipients will be recognized in a ceremony March 19, at 4 p.m., at the NEWESD 101 Conference Center. Registration forms may be found at http://www.esd101.net/Page/377. For more information, contact Sara Ballard at sballard@esd101.net or (509) 456-2715.

Register now for Knowledge Bowl

The 2015 Regional High School Knowledge Bowl will take place February 27 at Whitworth University.

Registration, open through February 2, is available at http://www.esd101.net/Page/371. For more information, contact Kim Cameron at kcameron@esd101.net or (509) 789-3547.
The winning of any competitive grant sets off a usual reaction of cheers and back-slapping. That was certainly the case earlier this year when NEWESD 101 was awarded a highly coveted Project Prevent grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

In this instance, however, the feeling was a little different. This time, the sheer joy of winning was trumped by two larger, deeper, more far-reaching considerations … the opportunity to: 1) undertake a first of its kind initiative in northeastern Washington and 2) address one of the fastest-growing needs in local schools.

With the grant, NEWESD 101 has, for the first time, deployed licensed mental health therapists in eligible schools in the Cheney, Medical Lake, Riverside and West Valley school districts.

While NEWESD 101 is a long-time provider of related services – offered by school nurses, prevention specialists, school psychologists and career counselors – funds never had been available to provide professional staff specifically dedicated to mental health.

Until now. Since January, eight full-time, licensed mental health professionals have been assigned rotations in 15 schools. Each school, depending on its size and caseload, receives 1-3 days of service per week.

The grant – totaling nearly $4 million – will provide sustained service, with the therapists deployed on a full-time basis over five years.

“This grant provides targeted, on-site, focused and sustained assistance in specific, high-need schools,” says Dr. Ramona Griffin, project director at NEWESD 101. “It offers a level of service and intensity that is unmatched.”

“Sadly, mental health is a growing need for schools everywhere,” she says. “Beyond the service we are providing these schools, we are building a model that can be replicated other places.”

The early returns have been promising. “Teachers and staff are reporting decreases in disruptive behavior and increased attendance by those receiving services,” says Gary Frost, grant coordinator and one of the licensed therapists. “These results in just the first two months bode well for the long-term outcome of the grant.”

… and advancing in Elementary Counseling

Shortly following receipt of the Project Prevent grant, NEWESD 101 received word that it also had been awarded a Department of Education Elementary Counseling grant.

With that competitive award – a three-year grant exceeding $1 million – NEWESD 101 will place school counselors in elementary schools across the Colfax, Creston, Oakesdale, Odessa, Reardan-Edwall, Sprague and Tekoa school districts.

The counselors can provide myriad services including individual, group and classroom instruction; case management and referral; and coordination of student services with school staff, families and partner organizations. Counselors will be deployed on a cooperative regional basis, assigned to each school an average of two days per week. Both grants are administered by NEWESD 101’s Center for Prevention Programs.
Earlier this spring my wife and I went to the movie, *Woman in Gold*.

The film is based on the true story of the late Maria Altmann, an elderly Jewish refugee, living in Los Angeles who, together with her young lawyer, Randy Schoenberg, fought the government of Austria for almost a decade to reclaim Gustav Klimt’s iconic painting of her aunt, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*. The painting was confiscated from her relatives by the Nazis in Vienna just prior to World War II.

As a former high school social studies teacher, the film was a sad and impactful reminder of the atrocities to which innocent people were subjected by the Nazi regime. Were I still in the classroom, I would offer extra credit to students to see a movie filled with important lessons in history.

Along with its historical value, however, I left the movie seeing parallels to realities in 2015, especially related to fighting for what one believes to be right or just; to persistence in staying with something and not giving up on yourself, or not giving up on others too soon; and to speaking up and out even (and perhaps especially) when forces seem against it.

In this true story, Altmann took her legal battle all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States, which ruled in her favor in *Republic of Austria v. Altmann* (2004). But along the way of a lengthy journey, there were times she lost faith and the will to continue the fight, yet her young attorney did not.

It made me think of times in my life and career where odds have seemed too great and the ordeal too long to stick with it. I thought of students I worked with along the way whose journey to success was long and bumpy at best; of teachers and educators whose early or temporary struggles to become effective, or regain effectiveness, led others to pressure me to give up on them.

I recalled a young man who, as a freshman at a school I once served as principal, was so difficult that it seemed clear we would never make it four years with him. But he stuck with it and grew up in the process, and we stuck with him, and in what seemed the blink of an eye, four years later he was crossing the stage at graduation and I shed tears thinking about a kid I once thought we couldn’t live with and now wondered how our school could live without him.

And I thought of a teacher about whom students and parents were howling, wanting the individual removed, when in fact what this professional needed was support and direction to grow and improve…and the person did.

It took a great deal of courage and resolve for Maria Altmann to stick with it, and perhaps even more for her young attorney to continue the fight even though his client temporarily abandoned it.

Similarly, it takes courage for teachers and parents who are philosophically concerned about over-testing of our children to continue to respectfully express such concerns in the face of educational “reformers” who are certain this is the right direction. It also takes courage for students, and their teachers, to stay positive and move forward even when the results of standardized tests might suggest they do otherwise.

I dare say we can all learn lessons from the battle waged by Maria Altmann and Randy Schoenberg to right a very old wrong. The journeys we travel may be long; we may be part of a silent majority; we may be pressured into giving in and giving up – on ourselves, on our ideals, or on those with whom we work.

Yet we must summon the best of ourselves and the courage we owe those we serve, with whom we work, and the reflection in our mirrors to stay at the principles and beliefs worth fighting for; and with those whose struggles are temporary…and not succumb and give up on them.

To the courageous educators in our region who respectfully stand up and speak up for your beliefs, for those you serve and with whom you work, enduring gratitude and respect is assuredly owed.

*Michael Dunn, Superintendent*
Harrington band takes the big stage

For rural students accustomed to long bus rides, even this trip was considered a monster – three states, 2,400 roundtrip miles and 51 hours on a school bus. What destination could be worth such a test of endurance? Why a trip to Disneyland, of course.

Nineteen band members in the Harrington School District, grades 8-12, recently made the pilgrimage to Anaheim, CA for the opportunity to perform at Disneyland and the Disney California Adventure Park. The band was invited following its submission of an audition video.

Students played two 30-minute programs that included the theme from the Avengers and the Star Wars Saga. In between, they also squeezed in some time to enjoy the parks.

A year of planning and fund-raising culminated with an amazing trip. Congratulations to Harrington music director Dave Nighswonger and his ambitious group of talented musicians.

CV’s Leanne Rainwater: Classified Employee of the Year

Ask students at University Elementary School (Central Valley School District) to describe Leanne Rainwater, the school’s head secretary, and the typical responses would include:

“The one who blows kisses; puts on Band-Aids; knows everyone; and gives hugs.”

Ask Principal Josh Wolcott the same question and he responds with:

“And, oh yes, don’t forget that she’s also an emergency responder, so to speak. At the beginning of each school year, it is not unusual for Rainwater to receive a call or two from the parking lot from an exasperated parent whose crying kindergartner won’t exit the car. Like magic, a few reassuring words from Rainwater is all it takes to calm the storm.

For 23 years in Central Valley, Rainwater has been a do-it-all performer as a para-educator, assistant secretary and, for the last seven years, head secretary at University.

Counting her previous contributions as a parent volunteer, she is now in her 25th year of district service. As a milestone year, it seems especially fitting, therefore, that her unofficial silver anniversary include something special.

It does. In March, Rainwater was recognized as the Classified Employee of the Year in the seven-county NEWESD 101 region. It is an honor that not only recognizes her ability to juggle myriad tasks – from monitoring budgets to tracking enrollment – but her ability to build relationships within the school community.

When he arrived last fall as the new principal at University, Wolcott asked, “Who are the leaders?” As the staff weighed in, Rainwater’s name came up repeatedly.

After a short time working together, he saw why. “She has been a critical part of our leadership team,” says Wolcott, crediting Rainwater’s work ethic, knowledge, humor and compassion for helping create “the University way” – a culture focused on positive relationships and high achievement.

“Individual attention makes a big difference in a student’s day,” she says. “I want them to know I care and that I am happy to see them.”

“Students look forward to walking by the office because they know Leanne will be blowing them kisses,” says Wolcott. “The impact that small gesture has on our culture, and our students’ lives, cannot be fully measured, but it can be seen on their faces.”

Two generations of CV students have been on the receiving end of those countless kisses blown across the school office. Two generations of smiling faces indeed speak to the powerful impact of small, thoughtful gestures, repeated over and over.

How powerful? Just ask the first generation that knew her.

Ask these people, now reflective young adults, what they remember about Leanne Rainwater. The most likely responses will include: “My adult friend and mentor; a dream maker; and a difference maker.”

Classified Employee of the Year is just icing on the cake. Congratulations, Leanne.
Changing of the guard

One, six, 1,700.

Those numbers, in a nutshell, describe Mike Kenney’s geometric progression through the pupil transportation ranks – one, the number of buses he initially drove for the Creston School District back in 1978; six, the number of buses for which he was later responsible as Creston’s transportation supervisor; and 1,700, the number of buses on which he now keeps tabs.

On June 30, Kenney will stop counting. On that day, he will retire as northeastern Washington’s regional transportation coordinator. Since 2001, he has been the region’s go-to guy for everything from bus driver training, to bus inspections, to bus depreciation and replacement.

While big shoes are left to fill, a strong and capable hand will continue the tradition of regional excellence.

Chris Jose, transportation supervisor in the Mead School District, will take the reins July 1. He comes aboard following six years at Mead. Already well known and respected statewide, he is president-elect of the Washington Association of Pupil Transportation.

Jose and his wife Karen are the parents of three daughters – students at Mt. Spokane High School, Whitworth University and Western Washington University.

Thank you, Mike. Welcome, Chris.

Life going to the dogs: It can be a good thing

Eric Dickson is a good sport. Friends have needled him a million times about his life going to the dogs. Yet no matter how many times he hears it, he always laughs – and agrees.

That’s because his life outside of work really is consumed by dogs – six of them in fact.

By day, Dickson is the industrial hygienist at NEWESD 101, assisting districts in keeping their buildings spic and span, safe and efficient. He is the one districts call when faced with anything nasty, unsafe or creepy-crawly.

Evenings and weekends, by contrast, are a different story. Here, the true Eric comes out. Dickson and his wife Julie participate in dog agility, or, as it’s known to insiders, just plain Agility.

By either name, it’s a fun, fast-paced sport in which handlers guide their dogs through a series of obstacles.

It’s a sport in which speed and accuracy are equally important, as the dogs must traverse a course requiring them to run, jump, weave and climb. A typical course includes about 20 varied obstacles that include tunnels, a teeter-totter, A-frame and numerous jumps.

The sport places a premium on teamwork and communication, as only one partner (the handler) knows the course layout ahead of time. Subtle cues from the handler are critical to success, as – just like an Olympic sport – time is measured to the hundredth of a second.

Unlike some of the dog shows on television, Agility is not about being best of breed. In this sport, classifications are not based on breed, but on the dog’s size, measured at the withers (base of the neck). The Dicksons own six dogs, all Shetland sheepdogs, or “Shelties” which run in the medium-size divisions. Eric is a relative newcomer to the sport, having participated only five years.

Julie, who has a number of championship titles on her dogs, began in the late 1990s. In fact, she qualified two dogs for the American Kennel Club National Agility Championships in Reno this past March.

A typical year sees the Dicksons participate in around 10 events in a roughly 500-mile radius extending from Wenatchee to Helena.

The sport brings many benefits, Dickson says. “We love being with the dogs, we meet a lot of great people and it’s a good way to stay in shape.”

And if anything creepy-crawly shows up in the ring, Eric can look the other way. When he’s away from the office, the dogs are more than happy to do the work for him.