

Pulsifer retires after 44 years at Neshobe

07-22-2021, Rutland Herald, by Jim Sabataso



BRANDON — After 44 years in education, Judi Pulsifer is moving on.

The longtime principal and teacher at Neshobe Elementary School retired last month, capping a career that touched the lives of scores of area children.

Growing up in Rutland, Pulsifer first got a taste for teaching in high school where she worked with children in special education classes. The experience stuck with her. She attended College of St. Joseph, initially deciding she wanted to be a special educator.

After graduation, she took a job at Forest Hills School — the predecessor to Neshobe — first as a reading teacher and then as a combined first- and second-grade teacher. She also kept her hand in special education, overseeing the school's program with fellow teacher Melody Wilson.

In the early 2000s, she made the jump to the administrative side, becoming Neshobe's assistant principal. Six years later, she was promoted to principal.

Throughout her career, Pulsifer said she strove to create a sense of community.

"I feel very strongly that every child needs to feel they belong," she said. "The closest thing to a community they had was their family at home. So we created a school family here at school. And when I became an administrator, it was my goal to create that kind of feeling throughout our school."

Molly Bull, who is a counselor at Neshobe, believes Pulsifer succeeded.

“She created a family at Neshobe School,” said Bull. “There was just such a feeling of connection and kindness and accepting of everybody no matter what. And that really started from her.”

Bull said she didn’t know Pulsifer prior to arriving at Neshobe two years ago, but said they have become close — especially as they worked together during the pandemic.

“As a school counselor, we sometimes have to deal with the most difficult situations. And Judi has such an incredible relationship with so many people in the community and so many parents that difficult conversations coming from Judi just fall differently,” she said. “Just watching that connection she could have and calm a student down and help them through really difficult things was just amazing to watch.”

Bull said the lessons she has learned from Pulsifer went beyond the practical matters of running a school, noting how she interacted and connected with students, families and other professionals “in a kind, compassionate way.”

Along the way, Pulsifer has learned some lessons of her own.

“The one thing I’ve learned is, you can learn a lot of book knowledge and you can certainly increase your expertise and your skills, but the most essential thing is that you can look into the heart of a child and see each child as an individual,” she said.

She’s also seen a lot change in education during the past four decades.

Pulsifer explained that schools are now better attuned to identifying and addressing learning disabilities that went undiagnosed in the past, as well as using trauma-informed practices to address students’ social-emotional needs so they are best equipped to learn.

“I think back to when I was early teaching — how little we knew about how the brain really worked,” she said.

But Pulsifer acknowledged that while times have changed, it hasn’t all been for the best.

“Our children are exposed to a lot of things,” she said. “In the course of my 44 years, I’ve seen what drug addiction has done to families. I’ve seen, certainly, violence has increased — what they see on television, what they’re exposed to in video games. I think our children are growing up much faster than they did in the past.”

Those challenges aside, she said she has enjoyed every single day at Neshobe.

“I have loved my career,” she said. “For 18 years, I’ve unloaded the buses every single morning and greeted every child coming to school. Working with children has certainly brought joy to my life.”

In an email, Jeanne Collins, superintendent of the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union, called Pulsifer a “consummate principal.”

“Her stable and child-focused leadership has made Neshobe School a state-of-the-art learning environment. Her dedication to this community has come through over and over,” she wrote. “I thank her for her years of leadership and contributions, and I wish her the very best as she moves forward in her own journey.”

On the school’s Facebook page, parents and former students also wished Pulsifer well.

“You have always been my favorite teacher. I am very blessed and thankful to have had you a part of my life during a tumultuous childhood in 1st and 2nd grade back in the early ’90s. Thank you! Enjoy your retirement you’ve certainly earned it,” wrote Jerilyn Langsdon.

Lori Mohan stated that all children should be lucky enough to have Pulsifer as “a part of their schooling years.”

Ethel Disorda thanked Pulsifer for her service, writing, “You have made a lasting impression on not only the kids, but the parents.”

“I can’t even imagine Neshobe school without Mrs. Pulsifer,” stated Wendy Coons Bizzarro. “I am forever grateful for all you have done for my girls. You will always hold a special place in all of our lives. Thank you so much for your selfless dedication to all of our children, and I hope you have a long, happy and relaxing retirement.”

In retirement, Pulsifer plans to take some time to enjoy life.

“I have two adult children, I have a husband, and I have a grandson — and I have lots of friends. I really would like to have a less scheduled life that I really have time to truly enjoy the people in my life,” she said.

“My goal was that I wanted to retire while I still loved what I did. And I certainly have achieved that goal.”