

Middle school principal ready for her ‘Sisters time’

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

Alison Baglien journeyed from Oregon to Chicago, around the world, and back again. The new principal of Sisters Middle School is a music fan who loves to hike, travel, and learn.

Baglien (pronounced BAG-lee-uhn) served as a resident principal in Chicago Public Schools, teacher and coordinator in Acero Charter Schools, and teacher and inclusion specialist in the schools of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

As a child she lived in Oregon and Washington until high school. Then Baglien’s parents moved the family to Chicago, which remained her home base until this year. Chicago offered career and educational opportunities — not to mention a world-renowned music scene.

“Where I lived in Chicago I could walk to 10 different venues in 10 minutes,” she said. A self-described music junkie, Baglien described her tastes as “all over the place.” In Chicago, she frequented indie shows and the symphony. Recent big concerts include Tom Petty, Tim McGraw, and Dead & Company. Two favorites are Fleetwood Mac and The Head and the Heart.

“I just like live music and how music makes you feel, how it can inspire,” Baglien said. She took in as many acts as she could at Sisters Folk Festival. “It’s been fun working with Brad (Tisdell of the festival) and the Studio to Schools grant,” she said, adding, “I did know that there was a good music scene before I moved here.”

Family is central to Baglien’s life.

“I have a huge, close family. My mom is one of 13. I have 40-some first cousins. I

love my 12 nieces and nephews as if they were my own kids,” she said. “We have these huge, Irish, wild kinds of weddings.”

The extended family returns frequently to Central Oregon, to the house at Black Butte Ranch they have maintained for decades. Baglien estimated she has visited Sisters Country several times a year throughout her life but noted that moving here permanently feels different.

“It’s exactly what I was looking for — a different lifestyle, pace of life, better work balance, and just having the outdoors nearby.”

Travel is another of Baglien’s passions. “I took my 30th year of life off to travel and volunteer around the world,” she told *The Nugget*. “That had a pretty big impact on the educational and career choices that I’ve made.”

She had been teaching at a private school in the affluent Lincoln Park area of Chicago. Additionally, she began mentoring in the South Side of Chicago, where communities are more ethnically and economically diverse.

Ultimately, she found it more rewarding than her day job, where she felt students

came from families that had issues but were probably “going to be okay in the long run.” She wanted to learn more about families and students in other situations. With the encouragement of her mentor at DePaul University and help from the Center for Cultural Interchange, Baglien set out on a volunteering journey.

“I was inspired in a lot of different ways,” she said. One inspiring place was Cuzco, Peru, near the ruins of Machu Picchu, where she went to school to learn Spanish. She then worked at schools in Ecuador, an experience she said “spurred me into being involved in a charter school in the Southwest Side of Chicago which was at 98 percent poverty level.”

The final location on her trip was a squatter settlement outside of Cape Town, South Africa.

“I was actually one of the last volunteers to go there,” she described, “because after I left, there was too much bloodshed to allow volunteers in there anymore.”

The trip brought “great experiences that will forever impact me,” Baglien said.



PHOTO PROVIDED

The new principal of Sisters Middle School was inspired by a volunteering and travel journey she took at age 30, including time in South Africa.

She returned to the University of Notre Dame to become a learning specialist.

Last year, Baglien was drawn to “the unique opportunity that we have in a three-school district. It is what attracted me to Sisters, to be honest.” Education in large schools and districts “turns into a lot of compliance and mandates,” Baglien said.

“To be able to work closely with other administrators

within a small town and a community that’s so invested in those schools — we should really be knocking it out of the park,” she said. “I think we’re close. We’re hitting a lot of doubles and triples, but we’re not there yet. And I like that. I like a challenge.”

Baglien concluded, “I’m a pretty big believer in things happening for the right reasons at the right time. I think this is my Sisters time.”

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