

in the company of **excellence**



Courtney Kiser has been teaching since 1977. His current classroom is the same room he had when he was in sixth grade.

Gabriel Bravo photo

Courtney Kiser

Making learning fun

Quality

A heart for young people guides Kiser's long career in teaching

Gabriel Bravo
The Dalles Chronicle

For the past 43 years Courtney Kiser has been educating kids across Wasco County, from Rufus to Maupin, to schools in The Dalles like Chenoweth Elementary, The Dalles Middle School and currently in Dry Hollow Elementary.

"This year I have 24 kids," Kiser said. "For the last eight years I've had 30-35, so this is about the smallest I've ever had in a long time. I've got a super nice group of kids."

Kiser keeps his students engaged and attentive by having fun, telling jokes and occasionally teasing them. Of course, his students return the favor and tease him back.

"Did you hear about the Spanish magician?" Kiser asked the class. "He counted, 'Uno, dos...' and disappeared without a trace."

Coincidentally, Kiser has come full circle and currently teaches fifth grade in the same classroom where he took sixth grade.

"Dry Hollow was brand new when I went to school," Kiser said. "I attended here through first and sixth grade. I can remember sitting over here in the last row, struggling with reading. It was a tough subject for me."

Since then the classroom's blackboards have been swapped out for dry-erase whiteboards, candid pho-

tos of Kiser's students line the back wall and photos of teams he's coached adorn the left side.

"Seven or eight years ago, I coached almost every sport," Kiser said. "Not because I was good at it but because usually there was somebody that needed someone to help the kids out and make sure they had a team. I've coached volleyball, football, basketball, soccer, wrestling. Getting to know the kids in a different way was a lot of fun."

For the candid photos that line the back of his classroom, Kiser said he wanted to capture the student's personality within a snapshot. In order to do that he handed out disposable cameras and had his students take photos of each other.

Other extracurricular activities that Kiser is involved in are chess club, student council, the Backpack Program and taking tickets at high school games.

"Our student council is doing pretty well this year," Kiser said. "We have a lot of projects. It's community oriented and so the things we do is try to help other people. For instance, we recently finished a campaign for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society for children. I was told we brought in over \$1,000 and I think the final count was \$1,100 or something like that. The Dry Hollow community is generous."

With so much work and contribution that Kiser has done for the community, the community decided to help him when he was in need. Last summer Kiser had

issues with his car. His estimate to get his car fixed was more than the car was worth.

John Lakes and Meg Twid, former students of Kiser and who were also married by him, decided to create a GoFundMe page in order to raise money for a new car.

"We were out at Spooky's and I was saying, 'Yeah, dog gone car had done fell apart again,'" Kiser said. "They didn't say a thing about it and that night they went home and made a GoFundMe account. There's so many wonderful things to do that for and I don't feel like I'm one of them. It was really nice of them to do that."

A total of 167 donations were made and raised \$10,770.

As the school year winds down and with so many lives touched by Kiser, he said he may teach for one more year before he retires.

"I still want to teach but I don't want my health to keep me from teaching," Kiser said. "But I think eventually it will because my body is getting tired earlier. I'll teach all day and then I'll go home and about six o'clock I'll go in and take a nap and my nap lasts until the next morning. I used to have a lot more energy than I have right now. I try to have as much as I can for the kids, but it takes a lot out of me after awhile."

Kiser said he'd like to thank the community for all they've done for him and making him feel special. If it was possible, Kiser said he'd mail a thank you note to everyone that has helped him in any way.

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