

Teacher

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ducing 3- and-4-year-olds to school, showering them with encouragement along the way. At age 60, she's just wrapping up another year of teaching four separate preschool classes.

She's that teacher who hand-paints students' faces for her annual Kitty Cat Party, compiles class cooking experiences into a book with every kid's picture on every page, and wipes down her classroom every 15 minutes during the school day to accommodate a student with a chronic illness.

"There are always waiting lists for Teacher Meg's classes," said Teresa Zade, who works at the school. "We've even had parents ask to be on the list right after the birth of their baby."

"On top of her seemingly unending love and energy, she has a genuine passion for teaching preschool kids," Bielemeier said. "The amount of time, effort, and money she puts into learning how to best teach our kids is beyond admirable."

"All of my children have been fortunate to have Teacher Meg as their first teacher and all of them still run up to her for one of her enveloping hugs every time they see her," Sheldon said. "Her love is so evident, so convincing, that years later, my big boys are still swept up in her presence every time they see her."

Teaching at a private preschool is no way to fund world travel, so, earlier this spring, when friends inquired whether Meg, a single mom, would visit her college-age daughter, Emily, while the 20-year-old studies art and architecture in Italy this summer, she replied that she couldn't afford it.

Privately, though, she's always wanted to visit the land of her forbears. Of Sicilian descent, she loves to cook Italian food and family recipes and retell the stories of her immigrant grandmother, Teresa Privattera. She loves food, art and culture with an intensity that she's passed on to her daughter and 36-year-old son, Kyle.

Meg hasn't traveled out of the country since she was in her 20s, and the farthest she's gone in the last 13 years was Iowa, Emily said.

"We've always been financially limited, so the only place we've been able to go is in the U.S.," Emily said. "She has been a joyful bystander while both her children travel internationally without so much as an inch of jealousy, only miles of enthusiasm."

When Meg heard Emily would travel

to Rome to study for eight weeks this summer, "she started screaming and jumping up and down," Bielemeier said. So, at an end-of-the-year preschool party, she and Sheldon decided to try to make her dream a reality.

Reaching parents was tricky because they didn't want to alert Meg until they'd gathered up donations, maybe \$500 or \$1,000, they thought. They compiled a list of nearly 100 families, made a private group on Facebook, and quietly introduced a GoFundMe campaign online.

In 24 hours, donors gave \$3,000. By the third day, donations climbed to \$4,930, with 70 contributors. And now that Meg knows about the fundraiser, it'll keep going.

"I'm not really surprised by the amount of money donated, but I'm totally shocked how fast it came in," Bielemeier said. "People are so generous and loving. They want to help; they have it in them; it just takes a worthy cause."

Donations of \$20, \$50, \$100 and \$200 came rolling in, many with comments about how Meg bettered their kids' – and their own – lives.

"Teacher Meg is a ray of sunshine and love on the children and families she touches," wrote Erin Redling. "As a parent I was able to learn the ability to incorporate fun in structure with children from Teacher Meg."

"I thought, 'This lady is too good to be true,'" added parent Nicole Orton, who first met Meg at a Silverton Together parenting classes. "With babies, she never got annoyed ... she just laughed when they spit up ... now I know this lady is a godsend!"

Parents like Orton, who met Meg in parenting classes, often went on to enroll their kids in preschool. Older kids at the K-8 Christian school once housed at the church took afternoon art classes from her. She also served as the artist in residence at Eugene Field School.

"My favorite is watercolor, but I dabble in everything," Meg said. "I love to do art, but, even more than that, I love to teach it."

Overall, Meg is a student of her students. She's fascinated with each stage of child development, curious about what kids' brains are doing as they grow up. Understanding them makes her uniquely compassionate to their needs.

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Meg picked up some of her teaching skills while growing up with four siblings. As a youngster, she also babysat constantly. And if she couldn't multitask initially, she learned how to do that – and to stay calm – during 14 years as a police dispatcher.

All of this combines to create a teacher who's unforgettable to those she's served over the years. When she runs into past students and their families; she remembers names and does out hugs like no time has passed.

"She's just naturally that way," Emily said. "She'll wake up in the morning, and be full of energy, drinking her coffee, and ready to go. A trip to Italy couldn't be a better fit: 'Coffee, wine, art, food. She will appreciate it all.'"

More donation details can be found online at <https://www.gofundme.com/send-teacher-meg-to-italy>.

IN BRIEF

June brings free concerts to senior center

SILVERTON – In June, musicians and bands will give free indoor concerts at 1 p.m. every Friday inside Silverton Senior Center. Audience members are invited to bring lunches or call several days ahead to order lunches for \$3 apiece. All ages are invited. Donations will be accepted. The remaining musical offerings for this month are Sarah Cleary on June 15, Silverton Ukulele Network on June 22 and Old Time Fiddler's Association on June 29. For more information, call 503-873-6906 or visit the center at 115 Westfield Street.

— Christena Brooks

Annual strawberry festival is Father's Day

The 67th annual Silverton Hills Strawberry Festival is Saturday, June 17. The festival runs from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Coolidge McClaine park. The cost is \$6, with those under age 2 and over age 80 eating free. For more information, call 503-873-5615.

Appeal Tribune

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Deadlines

News: 4 p.m. Thursday
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Obituaries: 11 a.m. Friday
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Published every Wednesday by the Statesman Journal, P.O. Box 13009, Salem, OR 97309.

USPS 469-860, Postmaster: Send address changes to Appeal Tribune, P.O. Box 13009, Salem, OR 97309.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID: Salem, OR and additional offices.

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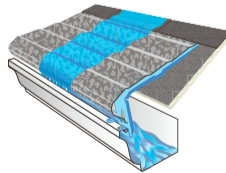
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