

Staff members envision their futures after retiring, look back fondly at years at WLHS

ALISON FIELDHOUSE & JENNIFER SITTON

Together they have devoted 116 years to the West Linn-Wilsonville School District. Those legacies will come to an end in the 2011-2012 school year when Tom Swearingen, Anna Druse, Gary Eppelsheimer and Marilyn Ellwood retire from their careers in education. While some have specific plans in mind for after they retire, others are simply reminiscent about the relationships they have developed working with students and fellow staff members.

Tom Swearingen, guidance counselor, 30 years

Tom Swearingen, guidance counselor, has been a part of the WLWV School District for 30 years in addition to 13 years he spent working in his home state of Ohio, but his passion for education has lasted much longer than that. Both of Swearingen's parents worked in education in his small hometown. His father was a principal and his mother taught for 43 years. According to Swearingen, the teachers in that town made a huge impact many of the youth.

"In fifth grade, there were five of us who went out to our hangout place, Pirates Pond,

After retirement, Swearingen has plans to work with homeless teens in Portland as well as various outreach programs through his



Anna Druse, English teacher, explains the symbolism behind the classic novel, "The Grapes of Wrath" to Dylan Musalo, junior. After Druse retires this year, she says she will miss working with students as well as her colleagues.

church.

"There are other needs out there that I would like to address," Swearingen said. But before he takes on those other needs, his service to WLHS students needs to be recognized.

"Mr. Swearingen is so amazing! He has helped me so much to not only find colleges to apply to, but to find colleges that are right for me," Kendall Weierich, junior,

his retirement, Anna Druse, English teacher, hasn't even had the time to stop and realize that she will be retiring after this year, let alone make

tangible plans for the future.

"I'm not counting down the days or anything like that," Druse said. "Gosh, I guess it hasn't even really hit me until just now."

Druse, who has taught English at WLHS since 1982 says that she always knew, at least a little bit, that she wanted to teach English, partly because of her love for school and partly her love of English.

"I have always loved school, ever since I was a little kid. I also had some incredible teachers who inspired me and made me think," Druse said. Those influences propelled her into a career that is clearly very important to her. "I love being in the classroom, interacting with kids in different ways, creating lessons and also working with my colleagues."

The relationships she has developed with her fellow English teachers showed when the English department put on the opening convocation assembly for seniors this year, something Druse considers one of her favorite memories at WLHS. While she will miss events like this, she is looking forward to traveling more after her retirement.

"I haven't planned any trips yet, but I know that we will travel. We will definitely get back to Europe. My relatives are in Italy and we love it there. We'd also like to explore countries we have never seen—Portugal, New Zealand, Turkey..." Druse said. "I probably should take a class in something I'm not very good at too, like art." While her future is full of open-ended possibilities, Druse looked back on her time at WLHS with melancholy.

"I'm going to miss interacting with the kids, being in the classroom and especially my colleagues. I love the days; every day, every year; they're all different," Druse

said. "I guess I just want to be remembered as someone who loved and had a passion for what she did, treated people fairly, listened and taught more than just English, because, really, we teach more than just our subjects—we help kids find who they are and hopefully help them become good people." Druse's moral compass and desire to impart knowledge beyond that of literature has rubbed off on her colleagues.

"She has a very strong moral sense in terms of what we should be expecting of students and what we should be delivering to them. She has extremely high standards and believes that we can't lower the bar," Sue Raivio, English teacher, said. "The whole department is really going to miss her. The other English teachers really use her as a resource because she knows a lot about literature. She's so dependable and we have a lot of laughs. I'm really going to miss her."

Gary Eppelsheimer, teacher, 32 years

Gary Eppelsheimer, film teacher, is someone you could call a mainstay of the West Linn community. He has lived in West Linn for practically all of his life, and attended Cedar oak primary school, Bolton and WLHS. He graduated from the high school in 1972 and began working at WLHS as an

to teach."

For Eppelsheimer, the best part of his job has been working with the students and helping them on projects that, back in the day, included shooting 35 mm slides which was how they made presentations before technology brought us computers and PowerPoint.

"I love watching students experience those 'aha' moments and taking a skill that I've taught them to a whole new level," Eppelsheimer said.

Before becoming a teacher, Eppelsheimer wanted to work for Channel 10 or Oregon Public Broadcasting to shoot nature shows. When he realized that he didn't have to work for a television station to do what he loved best, he took classes at Portland State University and was accepted to the Graduate Teacher Education Program.

Some of Eppelsheimer's best memories from his time at WLHS include when he, John Othus, deceased, Ward Lewis, English teacher, and Brad Freeman sang as a quartet. They sang in many plays including "Much Ado About Nothing" and "The Music Man."

"In 'Much Ado About Nothing', the four of us played the role of The Watch," Eppelsheimer said. "We also sang the national anthem at pep assemblies and in 'The Music Man,' the four of us



Tom Swearingen, guidance counselor, jokes with Mollie Schlunegger, senior, and Kami Vermillion, junior. Swearingen will be retiring after this year and plans to continue working with youth through various programs affiliated with his church.

and we made a pact with each other to all become teachers or coaches," Swearingen said. "Guess what? We all became educators or coaches."

He has come a long way from making that pact, but still finds joy in everything he does at WLHS, including working as a counselor with a "guide and step aside" motto. He stresses that everything he does is for students, parents and teachers because according to him, they are the "big deal," not him.

"I just want to be remembered as having served the kids and families. I tried to give the best service I could, be patient, kind and helpful, because that's how I was raised," Swearingen said. He plans to take that same moral approach into his retirement.

said. "He is one of the West Linn gems, incredibly friendly, approachable and passionate about his job. West Linn will miss him."

While many are sad to see him leave, Swearingen feels extremely confident in fellow guidance counselors Michelle Olson and Megan Kohl as well as Jennifer Jolly, who will be replacing Swearingen. "They are young, but incredibly mature. The respect I have for them is huge and the Jennifer Jolly will be a great addition to the guidance department. The students of WLHS are in good hands."

Anna Druse, English teacher, 29 years

While Swearingen has very specifically planned out what he plans to do with



Gary Eppelsheimer, teacher, listens in on a group conversation during class. Eppelsheimer has been in the district as a student, teacher and technician for 32 years. Some of his fondest memories include his forays as part of a quartet in school productions such as "The Music Man" and "Much Ado About Nothing."

Audio Visual Technician in 1979. In total, he's worked for 32 years as teacher, Library Media Specialist and AV technician. Prior to becoming a film teacher, Eppelsheimer taught sections of biology, Environmental Science, Photo 1 and Ecology Field Study, but he doesn't feel that you have to be a teacher to teach.

"Everybody here in one way or another teaches, whether it's by setting an example or providing new information," Eppelsheimer said. "You don't necessarily have to be a teacher

doubled with four students to make an octet."

Eppelsheimer hasn't completely let go of his performing career; just last year, he played Friar John in the school's production of Romeo and Juliet. According to Eppelsheimer, he likes the breaks from having to work on things purely related to work and enjoys interacting with others on a cooperative level.

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