

Volunteering rewarding for adventurer-teacher



PHOTOGRAPHER / Clackamas Print

Cleo White (right) helps YPOP student Millie Santamaria crochet a blanket for her baby.

JENNY CHAVEZ

Staff Writer

Retired teacher and volunteer Cleo White has brought a lifetime of adventure and a love of teaching to students

in Clackamas' Young Parents Opportunity Program (YPOP) while sharing her intricate art of crocheting.

White began volunteering for YPOP six years ago after responding to an ad for someone to teach young mothers crocheting. She's been there every

Wednesday ever since. Student Veronica Partida is one of her students.

"It's fun to learn how to crochet," said Partida, "because you can learn to make something special for your baby, to have and to remember when he is older."

White shows up faithfully because she loves to see the results from the students.

"They make beautiful things," she exclaimed. "They're proud of what they have done. It's a real self-builder craft and a skill they can use the rest of their lives."

White says she has always loved teaching. As a child she helped teach younger children in a one-room schoolhouse that she attended growing up in rural Idaho. She began a formal teaching career while still in Idaho, after getting her teaching credential through correspondence classes, community college and summer school. She taught there for 13 years.

"I taught in some classes where there was one teacher to four grades," White remarked.

While in Idaho, White heard of a need in Bogota, Colombia for teachers

at a mission school for 1000 boys.

According to White, she had wanderlust and eagerly accepted the assignment. She spent two years teaching at the South American mission, and fondly remembers her summer vacations as well—in the jungles of Colombia teaching children and adults who had no formal educational system. White recalled a 72-year-old man who wanted to learn to write his name. She not only taught him to write, but also to read; and then left him books so he could teach the children after the foreign instructors were gone.

White recalls another incident as well.

"This guy came galloping up full tilt," she recounted. "He stopped dead in his tracks right there and said, 'teach me math.'"

The man was a construction engineer but could only do simple math calculations. White was giving lessons to another student at the time and told him to wait until she was finished, forgetting the local cultural custom that women must drop everything when the man speaks. She suffered no repercussions and was pleased to teach

another eager student.

After returning to the United States, White moved to Portland where she taught elementary school for 25 years. She arrived during the late 1960s, when enforced integration laws meant buses of black children were transported from north and northeast Portland to the southeast, white-dominated schools. It was a new environment for White, just back from South America.

"The racism surprised me more than anything," she said. "I thought, 'when are we going to just be people instead of white, black, brown or yellow?'"

White's adventures didn't stop after she retired from the Portland schools. She traveled to Spain and spent a summer in Mexico to improve her Spanish-speaking skills. Now she's a part time Spanish instructor at St. John's School in Milwaukie.

White doesn't seem to run out of energy. She volunteers with a senior citizen program and teaches at Craft Mart in the evenings, in addition to sharing her craft with YPOP students.

"I love it," exclaimed White. "I enjoy the kids. They come because they want to learn. I just enjoy teaching."

Library clerk leaves behind co-workers and students

DANA PALMER

Staff Writer

Claudia O'Driscoll, Clackamas' library clerk for 19 years, will retire this year, and leave behind students and co-workers she considers beloved.

Prior to Clackamas, O'Driscoll worked for such public libraries as the Woodburn Public Library, Dickie Prairie and Rural Dale School. At Clackamas, O'Driscoll was in charge of inter-library loans and magazines, as part of her duties.

The need to make a living and a long love of libraries steered O'Driscoll to her chosen field. A 1962 graduate of San Jose (CA) State, O'Driscoll's major simultaneously prepared her for, and determined, her future career.

"I graduated with a bachelor's degree in English Literature," laughed O'Driscoll, "so I was used to books."

When asked to compare public libraries to academic libraries,

O'Driscoll had good things to say about both.

"I liked both," she said. "Public libraries were more of a social thing where people came to talk; there wasn't the heavy research. Academic libraries are more cyclical, they get more people during the rush times such as spring term."

Despite the cyclical nature of academic libraries, O'Driscoll, who seems bright, upbeat and funny, recounted stories that show that her years at Clackamas have been anything but dull. She has seen the library undergo tremendous changes, including extreme remodeling and construction due to mold. That required all library materials to be moved numerous times.

"The library moves were unforgettable," said O'Driscoll. "The whole library was moved to trailers. It was a lot of work but it built muscles."

O'Driscoll has seen the library advance technologically as well, since she came to Clackamas in 1982. At that time there was only one computer in the whole library, located in the back room.

"I had to learn a lot about computers," she remarked. "I didn't think that I liked them but now I have my own at home."

When asked what aspect of her work had been her least favorite, O'Driscoll recounted an aversion for numbers. This distaste, common to book and English lovers, is the only stereotypical aspect of a library

worker that O'Driscoll appears to embody.

In fact, O'Driscoll seems anything but stereotypical. While she believes that people envision librarians as wearing

their hair in buns and glasses, and constantly telling people to be quiet, O'Driscoll was quick to state she does not fit that mold.

"I never tell anyone to be quiet. I'm not quiet myself. It is funny how long stereotypes take to die," she said. "It is hard to work against that."

O'Driscoll says she has managed to retain her own personality and good humor. She sports close-cropped hair, and told the history of her haircut.

"I must say I did cut my hair quite a few years ago because I found myself wearing a bun," laughed O'Driscoll. "So I thought, 'ok this isn't going to happen.' So I cut my hair really short."

O'Driscoll left Clackamas

about a month ago and already misses the school.

"I'll miss the students and my fellow workers," she said. "I already miss interacting with students and getting the new ideas that they brought forth. It was exciting."

It appears the library will be quieter without O'Driscoll, but the long-time library clerk does not intend to let retirement slow her down. She has plans to kayak with her husband and their new puppy, and to continue her pottery work. And, when asked what book she would choose if stranded on a desert island, the ever-resourceful library clerk had a quick answer.

"I would take *War and Peace*," said O'Driscoll. "It's nice and long and was the book that I planned on reading upon retirement because now I'll have the time."

Claudia O'Driscoll, library clerk, will retire at the end of fall term. O'Driscoll has dedicated 19 years to library work, and was in charge of interlibrary loans and magazines. After retiring, she plans to spend more time with her husband and her new puppy. She also wants to go kayaking and continue her pottery work. O'Driscoll will be missed by students and co-workers.



MIKE POLLOCK / Clackamas Print

I already miss interacting with students and getting their ideas

Claudia O'Driscoll
library clerk

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