

# KeizerCommunity

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## McNary alum directing at Claggett Creek

By **DEREK WILEY**  
*Of the Keizertimes*

Rita Brown learned to play the violin as a student at Kennedy, Whiteaker and then McNary.

After 14 years at Houck Middle School in Salem, Brown has returned to Keizer to become the orchestra director at Claggett Creek Middle School.

"It was a chance to get into another area but also a chance to give back," Brown said of returning to Keizer. "This is my roots. The community as changed quite a bit so it's neat to see that change, too."

Wanting to be like her older sister, Brown began taking violin lessons when she was 7 years old.

"I wanted to be like her and then I wanted to be better than her," Brown said.

At 10, Brown already knew what she wanted to do with her life—direct.

"I don't know that I've really thought about it," Brown said. "I just knew my path."

That path included getting her bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma,



Rita Brown, who grew up in Keizer, is the new orchestra director at Claggett Creek Middle School, replacing Bruce Purdy.

Wash.

After a year directing in Tacoma, Brown started out at Houck teaching elementary students before becoming the full-time director.

She was able to grow the fourth grade orchestra from eight to 10 students to 25-40.

At Claggett, she teaches students from three of the feeder elementary schools,

Kennedy, Cummings and Weddle, as well as sixth, seventh and eighth graders at CCMS.

"It's a lot bigger than when I was a kid," Brown said. "It's

really neat. When I was in fourth grade, we had maybe eight or nine kids. They were very, very small"

Brown has 80 kids in her fourth grade orchestra, almost 60 fifth graders and 73 at CCMS.

Brown likes elementary and middle school students because they remind her of herself.

"They're super quirky and so am I," Brown said.

She also likes to be a part of their progress.

"You start them on that path and you see them take hold of it," Brown said. "You essentially see them turn into musicians in the course of four to five years you're working with them because at first they're just learning and modeling. By year four or five, you see them start to synthesize that. You send them off and hear about all the great things they do. It's really fun to watch that and help them mold that."

Brown is a quirky but also serious teacher.

"I want them to enjoy it but I also want them to take ownership in what they're learning," she said. "I try to

paint the picture for them of what it looks like to be at a certain level and I use the word excellence a lot and they're probably getting tired of hearing that. But I try to picture paint that so they have something that they can aim for."

Brown looks forward to working with CCMS band director Danny Hunt and choir director Sandra Krause.

"That's one of the neat things about the music and arts program in Keizer, it's pretty dynamic," Brown said. "It would be nice to see Claggett mirror that, which I think they do already but it would be nice to see it as a tripod. I'd like to see, especially at Claggett, our department become really involved."

Brown replaces Bruce Purdy, who was at CCMS since it opened.

Brown has a 3-year-old daughter.

"We're going to start her on violin and see if she likes it," Brown said. "We just sized her last week. She might be something else entirely. It's up to her. We're just going to start her and let her choose."

## Last chance



Holly Beaman (Daisy) and Dennis Fisher (Bogie) dance and sing during Keizer Homegrown Theatre's presentation of *Dog Park, The Musical*. The show ends Friday, Oct. 20 and Saturday, Oct. 21 in the Chemeketa Community College Auditorium, located in Building 6. Tickets are \$15 and available at the door or online at Brown Paper Tickets at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3091639>.

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