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## McNary teacher retiring after 30 years



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McNary history and psychology teacher Gary Bulen, with pictures of former students in his classroom, is retiring after 30 years in the Salem-Keizer school district. He's been at McNary full-time since 1991.

By **DEREK WILEY**  
Of the Keizertimes

After McNary's 2018 commencement, Gary Bulen called his two older brothers, both retired teachers, and wept.

"Before I knew it I was bawling my head off, out of left field, I lost it," said Bulen, who is retiring after 30 years of teaching. "I didn't realize it would be that but it sure turned into that."

Growing up in Salem and then going to Western Oregon University, Bulen didn't have much of a choice but to go into education. Along with his two brothers, Bulen's mom and dad also worked for the Salem-Keizer school district. There had been a Bulen employed with the district since 1955.

Gary Bulen did his student teaching at McNary in the spring of 1986. He was then hired on temporarily in '87.

After a little over a year at McKay, Bulen took a permanent position at McNary in '91 and never left.

"McNary just has something magical about it," Bulen said. "Every school ebbs and flows and has its ups and downs but really this is the school that historically people wanted to be at. It's just

a really quality school with quality kids."

Bulen spent most of his career in the same classroom after becoming activities director in 1994.

"I wanted to be more involved in my school and that was one of the best choices I ever made," Bulen said. "You run dances and prom and you need volunteers. When I was done (in 2002), I knew how hard it was to get them so I'm always at the prom and dances, track meets. There's also a payback for it. I think they (students) do recognize

that you do go to the plays, that you're around a lot helping. You get a lot more back than what you put in."

Bulen taught psychology and history at McNary.

Jessica King, a former student who graduated from McNary four years ago, returned to Bulen's classroom to wish him well in retirement.

"I had him for history my junior year and then I chose to take psychology my senior year," King said. "He's my favorite teacher. He's fun. He connects with you and wants the best for you."

Carla Bell, an English teacher

at McNary, had Bulen's current students write letters to him.

There was one common theme in most of the notes. Bulen was their favorite teacher.

One student wrote, "I've had a pretty rough year this year and I haven't really felt like being at school and being in your class actually made me want to be here."

Another student said, "I genuinely hope the best for you and I hope you know that your enjoyment of teaching is the reason I'm trying to go into it myself."

"I start getting a little

emotional. It's really special," Bulen said of reading the letters. "If you have poor self esteem, try retiring. It's an incredible ego boost. It's so nice to hear from kids. It's the whole reason we're here."

Bulen is looking forward to the next phase of his life.

"I'm just really ready for a change and to do something else, whatever it might be," Bulen said. "Take a little break and do a little traveling. I grew up here and all my friends are here. As a history teacher, I do want to go to Europe. My dad was a World War II vet. I want to see where he was at."

The 30 years have flown by.

"For years you're kind of anticipating this and it's pretty surreal that it's here all of the sudden," Bulen said. "It's right in front of you."

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