

From Berkeley to Clear Lake

New principal wants students to feel safe

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

Artonya Gemmill, Clear Lake Elementary's new principal, was planning on going to graduate school for psychology when she got a job as a live-in nanny for two boys with special needs.

"I knew I wanted to work with kids in some capacity," Gemmill said. "I just fell in love with teaching."

Gemmill, who grew up in Southern California and got her bachelor's degree in social work from the University of California in Berkeley, went back to school to get her master's in education from San Francisco State.

After five years teaching at an elementary school in California, she followed her then husband, a Keizer native who attended the original Clear Lake Elementary, to Oregon.

"He convinced me to move up here and I just kind of fell in love with Oregon," Gemmill said. "Once I was divorced, I wasn't moving back."

Gemmill's first job in Oregon was as a special education teacher at an elementary school in McMinnville. She then accepted a position with McKay High School, working with students with serious emotional behaviors.

She blended right in.

"I think the part that was the biggest hurdle for me to overcome was the fact that I looked like the students," Gemmill said. "Things they would not normally do in

front of an adult they would do, not realizing I'm a teacher."

Inspired by her principals in California and McMinnville, Gemmill decided to get into administration.

With the principal at McKay as her mentor, Gemmill enrolled in Salem-Keizer's inspiring administration program.

Taking classes at Willamette University in the summer and evenings, Gemmill began working towards her admin license. When Willamette closed its school of education, she finished at the University of Oregon.

After three years as a high school administrator at West Salem and two at South Salem, Gemmill became the principal at Brush College Elementary in West Salem in 2013.

Being in an elementary school is where she belonged.

"I knew that I'd always wanted to go back to being at the elementary school level but I also knew that I needed to get some experience as an administrator," Gemmill said. "It's where I wanted to be but it just took a couple of years to get back into the elementary school mindset."

Gemmill, who lives in South Salem with her 13-year-old son, wants to build relationships with parents and students.

"I tend to be the type of person that pretty's outgoing," she said. "I like to be inclusive. I like to just make sure



Artonya Gemmill comes to Clear Lake Elementary School in Keizer after five years as the principal at Brush College Elementary in West Salem.

that people can feel safe and comfortable coming into the building, that students can feel safe being at school and not feel like I'm not friendly."

She wants to spend more time listening and learning about Clear Lake before making any changes.

"I don't necessarily want

to rock the boat right now because I don't know what things are like just yet," Gemmill said. "Whatever's working, let's continue to make it stronger and whatever's not working, let's go back to the drawing board and see what we can do to make this more

effective. I'm not coming in a bulldozing everything, not my approach."

Clear Lake Elementary's first day of school is Wednesday, Sept. 5.

KEIZERTIMES/Derek Wiley

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McNary Band & Colorguard

Saturday, Sept. 8 is Band Day! The McNary Band & Colorguard would like to invite the people of the city of Keizer to help participate in Band Day. Please be on the look out for students in your neighborhood collecting refundable cans and plastic bottles. The band will also be stationed at McNary High School to accept bottles, cans and financial donations.

The money raised will kick off a year of competitions, concerts and education. Your support in the past is greatly appreciated. Help this year's band students reach their goal and achieve excellence.

If you're not going to be home on Sept. 8, please leave a bag of refundable cans and/or bottles on your door step marked for McNary Band.



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