

WING: 'It was a boatload of responsibility, but I loved it'

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to return to the gym.

"I always had in my head that I wanted to be a physical education teacher," Wing said. "This is a job where you can make a living, but you also have fun and get a chance to do fun things. It always came back to wanting to be in the gym and do things with kids."

After teaching and coaching prep basketball in Redmond and Corvallis, Wing applied for a pair of jobs in the Salem-Keizer area (Myers Elementary and Gubser). Wing was offered the job at both sites, but was persuaded to come to Gubser.

"I was offered both on that same day, but then principal Mel Hurley told me 'you interviewed here first, so you have to come to Gubser,'" Wing said.

After commuting to the school from Lake Oswego in his first year at Gubser, Wing, and his wife, Margot, built a house in Keizer — 200 meters away from Gubser — meaning that Wing got the opportunity to walk to school every day.

"I was able to go home for lunch and see my kids in their toddler stage and hang out with them before coming back to school. It was just amazing," Wing said.

There was one point in Wing's career where his wife worked at Gubser, and his two kids, Ace and Averi, attended the school.

One of Wing's favorite memories was when Averi was in kindergarten and raised her hand in the middle of class to tell her dad that she loved him.

"You can't get much better than things like that," Wing said.

Some people may get weary of working in the same place for more than 30 years. But Wing couldn't ever see himself at a different spot.

"Even though it's the same school, it's new kids every year, with new challenges. I always felt that the kids were the most important. It just seemed like when I went to look at other positions, high school or middle school, I could never find what I thought was a better thing for me to do," Wing said.

Although he is a former athlete, Wing's main motivation for teaching physical education isn't teaching a bunch of games. He wants his students to understand the necessity of physical fitness and continue to work on improving their endurance.

"When you're 25 or 30, you're not going to be playing some of these sports, but I want them to be able to go for a hike, or climb out of a situation where maybe if you fell into a hole, you could be strong enough to save yourself," Wing said. "I want kids moving. They are sitting in their classroom most of the day. But when they come in here, we are not going to spend much time sitting. I am happy if a kid is able to finally do a pushup without their knees touching. It's not a competition."

Along with teaching, Wing also served as the primary assistant coach for the Willamette University men's basketball team, which was one of the most successful small-college programs in the Northwest during his tenure.

With being a teacher and coach, as well as traveling for recruiting, Wing had a lot

on his plate. But he enjoyed every second of it.

"It was a boatload of responsibility, but I loved it," Wing said.

Wing was a part of the Willamette coaching staff from 1987 to 2009 and helped coach the Bearcats to the NAIA National Championship in 1993 when Willamette achieved a 29-4 record.

"(Wally) displayed a special talent in being able to connect with players of all ages. He was an excellent teacher of the game who stressed correct skill execution. He taught the fundamentals of the game, but most importantly he taught the fundamentals of life," said former Willamette head coach Gordie James.

Wing coached under James for each of his 22 seasons at Willamette. James is somewhat of a legend in local basketball circles and was the head coach for the lone varsity championship in Willamette history.

"We always had a lot of fun with basketball. Gordie had a chance to go to other places. Oregon State was even interested in one point, but he just liked the small school level. We always promoted the priority of academics, family, and basketball," Wing said. "He would get pretty intense, and I was the one that would reel him back. But we seemed to manage it and make it work."

When James retired in 2009, Wing was offered the head coaching job. But with both his kids active in playing sports at

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McNary at the time, Wing decided that he would step away from coaching for the time being so that he could be there to support his children in their athletic endeavors.

"I had to make a really tough decision. My kids were in high school at the time and I made the decision that I wanted to see them do their activities. I didn't want to be driving to Walla Walla or Spokane while they were here. I couldn't do both. I'm not disappointed that I didn't take it," Wing said.

In 2012, Wing returned to Willamette to serve as the interim women's basketball coach for six months while the program searched for a permanent replacement. After his tenure with the women's program, Wing got back into high school coaching at Salem Academy and Sprague High School.

Four years later, Wing began serving as an assistant varsity coach and JV head coach with the McNary boys basketball program. McNary's head coach, Ryan

Kirch, was actually coached by Wing as a youngster at a Willamette basketball camp in 1989 and recruited by Wing in the mid-90s.

"He is the silver fox around town. I could sit in here and talk with you for a whole day about how great it is to have him in our program," Kirch said. "We are really fortunate to have him."

Even after all these years, Wing still enjoys the little things that come with being a coach.

"Even things like getting on the bus and riding to the games, I still think that is a lot of fun," Wing said.

Wing has received plenty of recognition for his coaching prowess over the years, but in 2012 it was the dedication to the kids at Gubser that helped him receive a Crystal Apple award — Crystal Apples are annual awards given to public school educators who have made a positive impact on the lives of their students.

"The best part of Mr. Wing is that he has a huge heart for all his students. His students don't have to be athletically gifted to get his attention. They just have to walk into his gym. Whatever background they bring doesn't matter. Mr. Wing just finds a way to go a little bit further to be someone a little extra special, and his students love him for it," said Nancy Snyder, who's daughter, Emma, had Wing as a teacher."

While Wing is excited to have the time to see friends and family and go on outdoor adventures, he said that he will greatly miss working with kids every day.

"I will definitely miss the interactions with kids. Just the day to day checking in with them and trying to get them out of their shell," Wing said.



Beating the heat



ABOVE: A group of kids run through the splash fountain in Chalmers Jones Park on a sweltering afternoon Friday, June 25. High temperature records were shattered throughout the state as the a heat wave swept over the Pacific Northwest.

LEFT: Visitors at Keizer Rapids Parks launch watercraft on the afternoon of Saturday, June 27.

Photos by ERIC A. HOWALD and LYNDON ZAITZ of Keizertimes