

New and familiar faces in teaching positions at area schools

There are some new faces and some very familiar ones in the halls of south Morrow County Schools. New teachers at Heppner Elementary School include Molly Rill, Mary Ann Elguezabal and Lindsay Harle. Gordon Cooper is new at Heppner High School and Nohemi Estrada-Suro is a new teacher in Ione.



Molly Rill

Molly Rill, a kindergarten teacher at Heppner Elementary School, is teaching in the same room she had attended as a second grader.

Rill, 48, was born in Portland to Laurence and Florence Becket, but has lived in Heppner most of her life. Her great-grandfather settled in the Eight-Mile area in the 1880s and her grandfather moved up the road about five miles from where she was raised. Her husband Cecil's family homesteaded in the same canyon.

Rill graduated from Heppner High School in 1970. She married and had two children, Lonnie, now 21 and a lance corporal in the Marines working at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina, as a Hummer repairman; and Leland, 16, a junior at Heppner High School.

From 1984-1990 Rill was employed by the Morrow County School District, first as a secretary and eventually as an accounts payable/investment clerk. She then moved to the Morrow County Extension Office where she was officer coordinator from 1990-1999.

During that time she decided she wanted to earn a college degree. She received her bachelor's degree in liberal studies in 1998 and a master's in elementary education in 1999. Not only did she attend Heppner Elementary as a student, but also completed her student teaching there.

The same year Rill received her master's degree, she was hired at Sam Boardman Elementary School.

In addition to work, completing her education and raising a family, Rill has been active at Valby Lutheran Church, was a long-time member of the Soroptimist Club, was a member of the Heppner Elementary Site Council, a five-year member of the Morrow County School Board and was active in 4-H and the 4-H auction. She also enjoys gardening, canning, reading and watching football games.



Mary Ann Elguezabal

While Mary Ann Elguezabal is not new to Heppner Elementary, she is newly hired as a half-time reading teacher at HES.

Elguezabal, 45, was born at Nyssa to John and Peg Dority, and graduated from Nyssa High School in 1972. She met her husband, Juan, in high school and they married in 1973. After their marriage, she and Juan, who was born in a cave in Mexico, went to Mexico to live. She worked with her husband's

family on a cattle ranch and also as field laborers in onions, potatoes and beets in Oregon, Washington and Idaho. She laughs that she tried hard to keep up with her sisters-in-law, but couldn't quite do it.

She and her husband then returned to school at Eastern Oregon University. While attending school she worked as a lifeguard on the college campus. He graduated from college and she completed her student teaching, partly at Nyssa where they lived and partly at Nampa, Idaho. She graduated from Eastern in 1979 with a degree in elementary education before starting her family.

Daughter Petra, now 20, graduated from Heppner High School in 1998 and is a student at Western Oregon University at Monmouth; son Blas, 19, graduated from Heppner in 1999 and is a student at Eastern Oregon University; daughter, SanJuanita, 17, is a senior at HHS; son Juan Jesus "Chuy", 14, is a freshman at HHS; son Ignacio "Nacho", 10, is a fifth grader at Heppner Elementary School; and son Tomas, eight, is in the third grade at HES.

While raising their children Elguezabal also worked part-time and did substituting. She worked for Treasure Valley Community College at Ontario for seven years.

Her first full-time job was teaching third grade at St. Peter's Catholic School at Ontario beginning in 1997. That year her husband and their three oldest children came to Heppner, where he got a job teaching and coaching at HHS. She and the younger children joined them in Heppner in 1998 and she worked as a substitute teacher. In 1999 she was hired as third grade teacher at HES.

In her new capacity as reading teacher, Elguezabal says she will be focusing on children in grades three to five who need to make their state benchmarks in reading. "I want to teach every child to be a good reader," said Elguezabal.

She is also working hard at "keeping the family going" since her husband, Juan, a dedicated husband, father, teacher and coach, died this past summer.

Elguezabal is an active member of St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Heppner and enjoys watching sports and riding horseback. "I really like children," she added.



Lindsay Harle

While Lindsay Harle is a first year teacher this year, she is not new to Heppner Elementary School, having completed her student teaching at HES with teachers Mary Haguewood and Kay Chinen. Harle is the special education teacher at HES.

Harle, 23, is originally from Walla Walla, but grew up in Pendleton and The Dalles-Mosier area. Her parents are Jo Ann Tingue, who lives on Butter Creek, and Andy Harle, Newport. She attended high school at Wahtonka, where she played volleyball, softball and basketball. After graduating from Wahtonka in 1995, she attended Washington State University at Pullman, receiving a degree in elementary education/special education in 1999. While in college she played club volleyball and softball.

Harle says that WSU was very cooperative in "jumping through hoops" to allow her to complete her student teaching in Heppner. She finished student teaching in December of 1999 and then began substituting. She was hired in May to work for the Morrow County School District this fall. Already active in the

community, Harle helped coach volleyball at Heppner High School last fall and was HHS assistant softball coach this spring. Besides helping on the Butter Creek ranch, Harle enjoys animals, horseback riding, reading and cooking.



Gordon Cooper

Gordon Cooper, new math teacher at Heppner High School, comes to our small rural community as an international traveler, with experience working as a teacher in the U.S. and abroad.

Cooper, 55, born at Pocatello, Idaho, was raised around Emmett, Weiser and Boise, graduating from Emmett High School. He attended Brigham Young University where he received a degree in political science and international relations and also met his wife, Lynn.

After graduating from BYU in 1969, Cooper began teaching math at a junior high in Emmett. He taught on an emergency basis at three different schools, picking up education classes, and then became certified in social studies, history and government. Cooper received his math certification later, attending Boise State and BYU.

He began teaching at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota in 1972, right after the Wounded Knee incident in which Native Americans took over the town and were surrounded by the FBI.

From 1974-1976, he taught GED preparation and basic skills at the Wyoming State Prison.

From 1976 to 1982, Cooper left teaching and went into the family business, operating a gas station and convenience store at American Fork and Salt Lake City.

He returned to teaching in 1982, training jobless people for the Job Corps at Clearfield, Utah. He taught math skills and then taught college preparatory classes and supervised college students.

In 1986 he accepted an offer to teach social studies, history and job preparation at a correctional school at Caliente, Nevada.

In 1993, he and his wife, who is also a teacher, decided to go overseas and accepted positions at the American School of Kuwait. The school, with a population of around 1,200 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, consisted of around a quarter American students and a third Kuwaiti students, with the rest coming from around 40 different countries. He taught math and his wife taught music.

"We really liked it," said Cooper. "Kuwait is an easy foreign place to live. The Arab people are known for their hospitality. We were very well treated. In a lot of ways, we felt safer there than in the United States. We felt comfortable going out for a walk at night." The first place the Coopers lived overseas was among Iranian Shiites. Cooper said that the standard of living in Kuwait is very high and they were able to get most of the Western products they wanted.

The Coopers returned to the U.S. for a brief time so he could take care of family business and then moved to Saudi Arabia where he again taught math and she music. They lived on a Saudi air base, teaching children of Americans and British who maintained Saudi Air Force helicopters. After the Coopers had taught there for two years, the school was closed because of "low oil prices."

From there they traveled to Sakhalin, an island off the eastern coast of Siberia where he

taught "everything" in grades five through seven. At Sakhalin they worked for Marathon Oil, a Houston-based oil company developing resources there. They taught children of Americans and Irish working for the company. There were 10 students in the whole school. His wife taught K-third grade. "It was cold for us," said Cooper, "but the Russians said it wasn't."

After a year there, they returned to the U.S. again to take care of the family business and also to be with their children and grandchildren.

His wife accepted a teaching position at Vancouver and he was hired to teach integrated math I, II and III and calculus at HHS. "It's a good school with good kids," comments Cooper. "I think this would be a nice place to raise a family."

His math room at HHS is adorned with mementoes from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The Coopers, who have a home in Tualatin, have five grown children and nine grandchildren.



Nohemi Estrada-Suro

Nohemi Estrada-Suro, newly-hired Spanish teacher for grades seven-12 at Ione Schools, grew up learning the value of work and of education.

Estrada-Suro, originally from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, was one of 13 children in a blended family. Her mother died when she was only four years old and her father died when she was in her 20s. She grew up in

Juarez, a border town near El Paso, Texas, where her father owned a bakery. He had been a baker since before he married his first wife at the age of 15. The kids grew up working in the bakery before and after school, sometimes baking the bread when the baker didn't show up. Her father gave the children who worked in the business 25 percent of the income. The children had to pay for their own clothes and books, but Estrada-Suro saved her money and was even able to buy an MG-A to drive her last year of high school. She was only 16 when she graduated.

"I feel I was very fortunate that my father was paying me and giving me all that responsibility and freedom to develop. I always tell everyone that my father invented women's lib. He taught us to be self sufficient, independent and strong."

Those characteristics became invaluable for Estrada-Suro when she was left a widow with two children, a son Julio, then five, and a daughter, Teresa, then nine. At the time, she was in Juarez, "a dessert, dry, dusty with no trees," when she saw a 4x8 poster of Oregon. "I saw pine trees, deer and a creek. That's when I decided that's where I want to live."

So, by herself, she packed up the kids and moved to Hillsboro. "I hardly knew English, didn't have a job, didn't know anyone," she said. She started learning English at home, listening to a tape recorder. She made herself learn five words a day and then quizzed herself. She said that she was fortunate because she had good Spanish language skills and eventually taught herself enough to enroll at Clark College at Vancouver, where she earned an associate's degree. From there she transferred to the University of Portland where she received a bachelor of science degree in secondary education with an endorsement in Spanish.

After receiving her degree she taught Spanish at Poyter Junior High School in the Hillsboro School District for a year and then taught Spanish at Grant High School in the Portland School District for another year.

Estrada-Suro had been interested in journalism since entering a writing contest after high school. The contest's first

prize was a job on a newspaper, "El Pulso Politico." She wrote a eulogy to her mother and won the contest and the job. The experience was invaluable later when she decided to start her own newspaper.

Estrada-Suro quit teaching and founded her own bilingual newspaper, "El Pulso Hispano." She started the newspaper from scratch, did layout and wrote articles. Eventually she had two offices, one in Vancouver and one in Portland, and a readership of around 10,000 people all over the Northwest. "For the most part, I was the only one doing anything," she said. "It was so consuming that I came to the realization that I was killing myself. It was quite challenging and rewarding. I felt the Hispanic community needed a voice."

After four successful years, she shut the paper down and moved to El Paso, where she taught Spanish to 189 students at Address High School. The school had a population of a little over 5,000 students. Living in El Paso enabled her to often visit Juarez, which she had left 26 years before, and get reacquainted with her sisters.

The Northwest called to her again, however, when she learned that her daughter, who lives in Vancouver, was pregnant with her third child. Estrada wanted to be near Teresa and her grandchildren, blue-eyed, blonde-haired Shane, eight, and Josiah, 15 months; her son Julio, who lives in Portland and works for Union Pacific, and son Mike, who lives in Vancouver and attends Clark College, her alma mater.

Estrada-Suro, wanting a job closer to Vancouver, but away from the larger cities, found Ione on the Internet.

"I'm very happy to be here at Ione," she said. "I have found the students very motivated and eager to learn. I have some very bright students."

Estrada-Suro is not yet done with her education, however, and is looking for an on-line master's program in Spanish to complete in her "spare time."

In addition to always being on the lookout for new teaching ideas and strategies, Estrada is working on developing Spanish teaching aids. She also enjoys fishing, working in the yard and writing.



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