

Longtime librarian closes the book on career

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Kristi Smalley's first impression of Hermiston is not the one that has stuck with her.

Smalley will retire this month, after 36 years serving the Hermiston School District as a teacher and librarian for the elementary schools.

But she still remembers her initial reaction to finding out about a job opening in the town she'd grow to love. It was August of 1982 and Smalley, then 21, was just out of college and applying to jobs in Colorado and Montana.

"My mom told me to apply for a job here," Smalley said. "I said, 'It smells like feedlots and that's where my dentist is.' That's what I equated Hermiston with."

But Smalley took the job, and two weeks later, was standing in front of a classroom full of first graders.

So began a long career working with kids, and handling the changes schools and libraries have seen in the past few decades.

As she prepares to step back, Smalley said retirement will require a mental shift.

"It was a hard decision to make," she said. "So much of my identity is 'I'm a teacher.' But I don't think you ever stop being a teacher. You just use that skill in a different way."

Smalley plans to use it doing the things she loves — volunteering in classrooms when she can, and serving on the boards of organizations such as the ARC of Umatilla County and Special Olympics, where her daughter Jillian is an athlete.

Smalley recalled some of the highlights and shifts



throughout her career. She has stayed in contact with some of her students, recalling one girl in the first class she ever taught, who is now a teacher herself.

"She would send me postcards from exotic locales where she was teaching," Smalley said, picking up a photo of the woman teaching in the Philippines. "One of the cool things is having someone like that who I stay in touch with."

In the mid-1990s, after teaching everything from first through sixth grade at several different schools, Smalley said her principal told her about an opening as the librarian at Highland Hills.

She had recently had a baby, and after a stint teaching part-time, she was ready

to go back to a full-time position.

"I decided it was probably a good fit for me," she said.

Despite the steep learning curve, Smalley said she enjoyed the new role, working with all grade levels and focusing on teaching kids the proper ways to use library resources.

As schools dealt with budget cuts and changes, she found herself at different schools, or splitting her time at two different schools.

In the late 2000s when the recession hit, the district laid off all but two of the district's librarians — one for the secondary schools, and one for all five elementary schools. Smalley said her seniority in the district meant she got to keep her

job.

But there were challenges — having to establish relationships at each building, and figure out the unique needs of different schools with limited time was tough, Smalley said.

"You would think five days a week and five schools sounds real good," Smalley said. "But you have holidays, Wednesday early release. In this position, you flow where you need to go."

She said she will sometimes find herself at all five schools in one day, and her tasks have shifted from the frequent lessons she was able to do when she was just at one school.

"They'd get instructions on book selection, the Dewey Decimal system,



Above, Kristi Smalley holds a class photo of the first class of students she taught at Rocky Heights Elementary in Hermiston.



At left, she shows the keys to all the libraries she is in charge of in the school district.

Far left, Kristi Smalley will retire this month after 36 years with the Hermiston School District as a teacher and librarian for the elementary schools.

STAFF PHOTOS BY E.J. HARRIS

how to search for books," Smalley said. "When I was at one building, I felt like the kids would exit with some skills. But now it's impossible to give that level of instruction — now it's instruction at the point of need."

Smalley credited library assistants and teachers with stepping in to fill some of the instruction on how to use library services. The bulk of her time now goes to a few other things: accelerated reading testing, facilitating the Battle of the Books program, and some inventory and library management.

But she said she still tries to find as much time as possible to work one-on-one with students.

"A teacher may come to me and say they have a kid

that's really not enjoying reading," she said. Smalley enjoys helping those students find books and subjects that interest them.

She noted the major changes in technology since she started working in libraries, from digitizing catalogs to bringing in computers with educational programs.

"We needed to make sure computers are tools, not toys," she said.

Smalley said she's happy to pass the baton to her successor, Megan Reeve, who currently teaches in the Hermiston School District.

"I've worked with her, and she's very supportive of literacy, of reading and of Battle of the Books," she said. "I'm very excited about her carrying on the traditions."

District outlines graduation rules

Transportation available to new venue in Kennewick

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston's graduation this year will mark significant changes, both for the individuals tossing their caps, and for the school district itself.

The 332 members of the class of 2018 will be the first to graduate at a venue outside Hermiston, as their ceremony will be held at the Toyota Center in Kennewick on Thursday, June 7.

Billed by the school district as a decision meant to

accommodate the growing number of graduates and their families, the district is also providing transportation for those families to get to the venue, which is about 30 miles away from Hermiston.

The Toyota Center is at 7000 W. Grandridge Blvd., Kennewick, Wash.

The district is providing buses for parents to and from Kennewick, but district spokesperson Maria Duron said the high school already sent a letter informing parents that they need to sign up if they want to use school transportation.

The deadline was May 11, she said, but if parents missed the deadline and still need transportation, they should contact counseling secretary Tammy Gattis as soon as possible. Families taking school

transportation to Kennewick need to be at the high school parking lot by 5:45 p.m.

Gattis can be reached at 541-667-6125 or at tammy.gattis@hermiston.org.

Graduates will be bused up to the Toyota Center on the day of graduation, and will need to be at the high school by 5 p.m.

Graduation will also be live-streamed at the district's YouTube channel. To find it, family members can search "HSD Communications" on YouTube.

Duron said there are some clothing requirements for graduating seniors. Those students are not allowed to wear shorts or flip-flops, and caps and gowns are to remain intact, with no additional decorations.

Though it's been a com-

mon practice at previous graduations, Duron said things like noisemakers, silly string and confetti will not be allowed in the Toyota Center, and flowers are not allowed on the floor with graduates. Outside food and beverages are also not allowed in the Toyota Center.

"Due to the fact that there will be subsequent graduations other than just ours, it is imperative that the above rules are followed," Duron said in a written statement.

A professional photography studio, LifeTouch, will be taking photos of individual students during the ceremony, and will be available for purchase.

The after-graduation party will be at the Tri-City Court Club after the ceremony.

Seniors take Walk of Fame through former schools

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

Graduation isn't until Thursday, but Hermiston High School students got an excuse to don their caps and gowns last week for the school's "Walk of Fame."

The purple-clad senior class strolled the halls of their old elementary schools Friday as students clapped and cheered, then took a second walk back through Hermiston High School, led by a group of drummers. They ended up in the commons, where each student had the opportunity to sign a poster board with "Four Year College," "Military" or other post-graduation plans written on them.

Larry Usher, athletic/activities director for the high school, congratulated the Class of 2018 and told them to have fun and make their hometown proud. He told students he could see it in their eyes that many of them were nervous about what was next, but they didn't need to be.

"The best part of your life is about to begin," he told them.

The students will walk across the stage to receive their diploma Thursday — the first Hermiston class to do so at the Toyota Center in the Tri-Cities. Senior Jakelyn Pacheco said she could hardly believe the big day was coming up so soon.

Pacheco said she chose to walk through the halls of Rocky Heights Elementary School, where she attended for four years.

"I saw two of my teachers, and it was so nice to see them after so long," she



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY SHARA GIORDANO

Graduating seniors walk through the halls of Highland Hills Elementary School during the Walk of Fame on Friday. For more photos, see A13.

said. "We took pictures." She said it was amazing to "see the little kids looking up to you, and you want to set a good example."

Daniel Studebaker had a similar reaction. He didn't move to Hermiston until seventh grade, but chose to visit West Park Elementary School to be an inspiration to his cousins who attend there.

"It was crazy, all these kids looking up to you like you're Superman," he said. "It opens your eyes."

Studebaker post-graduation plans are for service in the Coast Guard, and he said while he's excited, "it hasn't really hit me yet."

April Brooks is enlisting in the Army National Guard and then plans to study law at Portland State University. She said she did her Walk of Fame through Sunset Elementary School.

"It was really cool and the kids were so cute," she said.

Five students win Kiwanis scholarships

The Hermiston Kiwanis Club recently announced it awarded a handful of \$1,000 scholarships.

Flor Pena and Laura Wells each received a Perry Johnson Post-Secondary Education Scholarship. Both members of the Hermiston High School class of 2018, Pena has been accepted at several universities and plans to pursue a degree in nursing, and Wells will attend Whitworth University to study engineering with a minor in physics.

Russell Dorran Memorial Scholarships were awarded to Carla Medel, a 2017 HHS graduate who is currently enrolled and studying psychology at Oregon State University; Alexis Myers, who will study agricultural communication at Utah State University; and Eric Santana, who plans to enroll at the University of

Portland to study accounting and business management. Both Myers and Santana are graduating from HHS this week.

The scholarships are given in memory of a pair of past Kiwanis members. Dorran was a charter member of the club, as well as the Hermiston Elks Lodge, Hermiston Development Corporation and the Blue Mountain Community College board. Johnson was a Baptist minister who supported youth services and education.

The scholarship applicants were evaluated on academic achievements, financial need, and leadership and service activities within their school and community. For more information about the Kiwanis scholarship program, write P.O. Box 375, Hermiston, OR 97838.



Myers



Pena



Santana Lopez



Wells