

Lamorinda's Longtime Sub Says Goodbye

By Sophie Braccini



Substitute teacher Monica Foley is now retiring. Photo Sophie Braccini

Monica Foley is getting ready for the summer, a peaceful moment in a substitute teacher's life when she knows that no one will call her for the next three months to impromptu replace any kindergarten to eighth-grade teacher in Lamorinda. But this year, the youthful 82-year-old will not return come the end of August.

"It was time," she says about her well-deserved retirement.

Superintendent of Moraga School District Bruce Burns says that the thriving educator substituted 89 days this year — almost half of the school days. He says that her tenure in the MSD might just be one of the more unique teaching experiences anywhere as she has substitute-taught in the district since 1978.

Foley, who is a K-8 credentialed teacher originally from southern California, stopped teaching fulltime when she had children and moved to Moraga. She raised a family of six children — five boys and a girl. But tragedy struck them all when her oldest son died at age 18 from heart failure.

"That's when I decided to go back to teaching. I wanted to be out of the house and busy," she says, adding that her family's strong faith kept them going.

There were still many kids at home, so she decided to substitute, rather than take a fulltime position. For the past 38 years she has taught K through eighth grade with the same delight in all three Lamorinda school districts. She says that third grade might be her favorite to teach, as well as middle school, because she loves the challenge and energy of the older kids.

She subbed six or seven times for longer periods of times, at the beginning of her career. What impresses her most over the years is the change in technology. She remembers the time of blackboards, and loves the new white board where you just have to press a button to get a printout of the presentation.

She believes that the kids are more advanced now. Things that were taught in first grade are now taught in kindergarten, but kids re-

main, as she says, just wonderful. She has noticed though that they might be a little more disrespectful than they used to be. "They don't seem to respect each other as much," she says. "This may be a sign of the time."

She finds the children to also be more in tune with the world and what is going on in society. She adds that the flip side of this is that they have less time to just be kids. She remembers a kindergarten class in the early days where you could lay down in the grass and just look at the sky. "We can't do that anymore. They have to learn their numbers, do this or that," she says with not much regret, as she acknowledges this is just what society is now requiring of children.

Foley has taught it all: math and English of course, also P.E., woodshop, sciences and drama. She would avail herself to whatever was needed, because she knew the teacher she would replace, and that the lesson plan would be ready for her. She has a lot of respect for the Lamorinda teachers, their dedication, unselfishness, and how they do everything they can for the kids.

Burns believes that she will be missed by all. "Monica has the rare ability to connect with and educate 5-year-old kindergartners one day and the 'big-time' fifth graders the next day," he says. "She has an uncanny know-how to establish relationships with all students, no matter the grade, age of student or student performance level." He believes that her consistency in being fair and firm with all students has resulted in a high level of respect from them.

The teacher says that all along it made her happy to just open that door and enter the classroom. She might miss it somewhat come the fall. But as she told her friends when they asked her how much longer she would teach, she knew when the time to retire would come, and it finally did. She also wants to have more free time. Foley's children live all relatively close by; she has six grandchildren age eight to 24. No one has decided to become a teacher, yet.

But, who knows? Foley re-

members her own grandmother who was a teacher in Kansas, managing a one-room class with all ages. She may have inherited from her the natural ability and temperament to teach kids.



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