



Shaker Schools' Educator Emeritus program offers energetic retirees a way to put their undiminished passion for teaching back into service.

By Jennifer Proe



e•mer•i•tus [ih-mer-i-tuhs], adj. Retired or honorably discharged from active professional duty, but retaining the title of one's office or position. From the Latin origin, 'having fully earned'; a veteran soldier who has earned his time." – Dictionary.com

Each year, a wealth of talent and experience leaves the Shaker schools as veteran teachers retire from their posts. And each year, a substantial portion of that talent returns to our schools, as many of those retirees choose to remain connected in a volunteer capacity known as "Educator Emeritus," sharing their accumulated wisdom with a new generation of teachers and students.

The idea for the Educator Emeritus program originated with former Shaker High School English teacher Steven Fox, who served the Shaker Schools for more than 30 years. In a proposal to Superintendent Mark Freeman, he advocated for the creation of this role, noting, "It would be appropriate for the District to recognize that some of its long-standing staff, staff who have spent the entirety or great majority of their careers teaching the children of Shaker Heights, are properly described as having 'earned' their discharge rather than having simply left the profession. Even though they are no longer on the payroll, they can, and often do, make valuable contributions to the Shaker educational community and to the profession at large."

Fox was not merely suggesting an honorary designation. He envisioned the program as a way to welcome back those teachers who had a strong desire to continue contributing their time and expertise by volunteering in classrooms, advising younger teachers, consulting with colleagues, or generally applying their knowledge in service to the schools. "The message implied [by the program] would be that Shaker is an educational community that never stops encouraging, recognizing, and rewarding excellence among its staff," Fox wrote.

Freeman embraced the idea of connecting past with present. To bring it to fruition, he appointed a small committee in 2008 to create the program parameters. Together, Steven Fox, retired Fernway principal Donald Coffee, Boulevard principal Colleen Longo, and then-Registrar Glenda Moss crafted the following guidelines:

- Educators may apply after one year of retirement.
- Individuals must have completed at least 20 years of service in education, the last ten or more in the Shaker Schools.
- Selected individuals will have displayed the high level of professionalism that characterizes Shaker educators.
- Individuals must have demonstrated continued involvement with the Shaker Schools.

To date, more than a dozen Shaker retirees can claim Emeritus status, with more candidates applying each year. Each Educator Emeritus is assigned to the building in which he or she worked (although their volunteer service may take them elsewhere in the District), and receives a Shaker e-mail address, business cards, and ID badge to help stay in the loop.

Paving the way as the first Emeriti were Steven Fox and Donald Coffee, both of whom had already found ways to stay involved after retirement. Fox continued to spend time with High School students, primarily by teaching technical writing in Joe Marencik's engineering class. He also spoke to students and teachers



The idea for the Educator Emeritus program originated with retired High School English teacher Steven Fox, pictured here in 1985, who envisioned a way to welcome back teachers with a strong desire to contribute their time and expertise by volunteering in classrooms, advising younger teachers, and applying their knowledge in service to the schools. Photo from 1985 Gristmill.

Photo by Colleen McCreary



in the Advanced Placement English classes to explain how their AP exams would be scored, transferring valuable knowledge from his vast store of experience. With a record number of 159 AP Scholars last year, it seems that some of that knowledge transfer may still be paying dividends.

Coffee, who served as Fernway principal from 1971 to 1991, remains active as president of the Shaker Heights Retired School Employees' Association. "Shaker is an outstanding school system with a diverse population. The professional nature of the system, and the parents' recognition of the importance of education, is what made me want to stay involved after retirement," he says.

Coffee coordinates a small army of Shaker retirees, some of whom he has recruited to the Emeritus program, to produce a newsletter and plan luncheons for members of the association. "Retired

Emerita Janet Houk works on reading skills with a small group of students on a weekly basis. Houk envisions recruiting more retirees to volunteer in a similar capacity.

CELEBRATING SHAKER HEIGHTS' CENTENNIAL 1912-2012

PROUD TO SHARE IN SHAKER'S HISTORY
FAMILY OWNED AND OPERATED SINCE 1976



HOMESTEAD

ROOFING

35 YEARS IN SHAKER

EXPERT SERVICE

SLATE REPAIRS

TILE REPAIRS

GUTTER REPAIRS

ICE DAMAGE

SLATE AND TILE

ROOF RESTORATION

216-382-7677

500 SOUTH GREEN ROAD
SOUTH EUCLID, OHIO 44121

FREE ESTIMATES

COPPER WORK

FLASHING

DOWNSPOUTS

SNOW GUARDS

HEAT CABLES

HOMESTEAD-ROOFING.COM



The Ranks of Educator Emeritus

The growing ranks of Educators Emeriti include faculty members from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines. They contribute as volunteers in the classroom, guest speakers, travel chaperones, exam proctors, and more. To date, the list includes:

- Steven Fox**, High School (2009)
- Donald Coffee**, Fernway (2009)
- Rosemary Nagy**, Onaway (2010)
- Barbara Hise**, Woodbury (2010)
- Joyce Pope**, Boulevard (2010)
- Olivia (Marianne) Schwartz**, High School (2011)
- Robert Sylak**, High School (2011)
- Beth Illes-Johnson**, High School (2011)
- Donna Brittain**, Mercer (2011)
- Janet Houk**, Woodbury (2011)
- Glenda Moss**, Administration (2012)
- Diane Smith**, High School (2012)
- Isaac Smith**, High School (2012)

To nominate a retired faculty or staff member for the program, or to request an application, contact Ouimet Smith, Registrar, at smith_o@shaker.org, or 216-295-1400.

Design & Build

- Custom Kitchens
- Custom Baths
- Wet Bars
- Wine Storage
- Closets & Built -Ins
- Finished Basements
- Custom Flooring
- Windows & Doors
- Other Remodeling Projects
- Complementary
In Home Consultation*
- Lead Safe Certified*



R H Kitchen and Bath Ltd

Where creative design meets meticulous execution

(440) 248 - 0530 www.rhkitchenandbath.com

www.facebook.com/rhkitchenandbath



Retired Fernway principal Donald Coffee leads efforts to keep retirees connected through a periodic newsletter and social gatherings.

Shaker teachers love to get together and get updates on the schools,” says Coffee. “Recently, we made a conscious effort to make a stronger contribution to the Shaker Schools Foundation as another way to give back.”

Coffee and his wife, Xiao Ying, have also organized a number of trips to China for Shaker retirees, and have enjoyed meeting some of the District’s visiting guest teachers from China who teach Mandarin to Shaker students in grades 1-12.

One of Shaker’s most recent Emeriti, Janet Houk, learned about the program before she retired. “I was fascinated by the idea, and decided that I wanted to stay plugged in and give back.”

Houk began her Shaker teaching career at Moreland School in 1970. She later worked at Lomond School until 1992, and subsequently at Woodbury School, first as a sixth-grade teacher and then as a part-time skills tutor, retiring in 2010.

She didn’t let much grass grow under her feet before jumping back in. “I love kids, and I loved what I was doing, especially with literacy. I requested to work

with a small group of students who were reading below grade level. I see a need for mentors in the system, because I believe that kids are changed one at a time. I know that if I can get them to love reading, it unlocks a whole world for them.”

Woodbury librarian Mary Strouse found the perfect fit for Houk’s talents with the Accelerated Reader program, which is designed to motivate students to become more proficient readers. Strouse connected Houk with three students whom she believed could benefit greatly from Houk’s undivided attention on a weekly basis. Says Houk, “The students definitely look forward to their time with me. I read to them, and they read to me. We set up motivational benchmarks, and when they meet them, we have a small reward, like a pizza lunch together. The students motivate one another, too; there is some friendly competition to meet their goals.”

The results seem to be mutually beneficial. “They are feeling some success, which is important, and enjoying the encouragement and individual attention,” says Houk. “And I love it! I feel so much

better when I walk out of there. I feel like I am making a difference.” Having completed a full school year in this role, Houk now envisions recruiting more retirees to volunteer in a similar capacity. “I would love to see it ripple out. I know there are more people who would like to do what I’m doing.”

Among the ranks of those soon to be inducted is Glenda Moss, who not only helped to shape the program initially, but became its caretaker during her time as registrar for the Shaker Schools. (That duty now falls to her successor, Ouimet Smith.) Says Moss, “I can’t wait to come back in and help out with the kindergarten open houses, and to do anything I can to help new students get settled and busy at school.”

Having worked for 27 years at the High School teaching cooperative business education, and then 10 years as registrar, Moss could not be faulted for taking a well-deserved rest and moving on to a life of leisure. “That’s not for me,” she says. “After giving so much of my life to the schools, I want to be able to say I’m still actively involved in my district.” 🐦