

Busy Kay Briggs retires to a crowded schedule

By LYNN ORR

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Key Briggs is retiring—sort of. With 27 consecutive years of service tucked under her belt, at 65 she's retiring as a special education consultant to the Farmington School District. But she'll be back in the fall to volunteer as an aide to the intellectually gifted program.

And it's doubtful that official retirement will slow her pace.

Two years ago she was voted "hippest grandmother" as she and her 11-year-old granddaughter Debbie traveled the Colorado River in a rubber raft. For this fall, she has planned a trip to India in such detail that there'll be a full moon striking on the Taj Mahal when she departs.

Retirement, she hopes, will give her a chance to visit the few spots on the globe she's missed, like Alaska, Australia, and China. But unlike other retirees, she doesn't intend to give up her home for summer months.

"I plan to stay right where I am," she says firmly.

"I've got an awful lot of energy," she says, with a trace of apology in her voice. Her competitors in the intermediate class of doubles tennis players among the teachers' round-robin tourney have to believe that.

Barely five feet tall, Mrs. Briggs walked away with the trophy this year. She skied cross-country in the Sierra Nevadas with her grandchildren last winter, and she's at meetings nearly every night.

In fact, if something's going on in Farmington, Mrs. Briggs is usually there. She's active in the American Association of University Women (AAUW), a director of the Farmington-Livingston credit union, state chairperson of overseas expansion of Delta Kappa Gamma, an education society, a boardmember of the Methodist Children's Home; a member of

the Farmington Arts Commission; teaches Sunday School at Carnegieville Methodist Church; and each month she'll chair the Michigan Regional Lily Society's show at the Tel-Twelve Mall.

"I live 365 days a year, and every experience is a new thing," she says softly.

As the kind of person who moves without outside motivation, she expresses the hope that teachers are beginning. When her husband, Robert, died a few years ago, her life changed but didn't stop.

"I couldn't sit and grieve. It was a part of my life that was over," she explains, much like going through another door.

But the past isn't forgotten. She still keeps in touch with some of her students from her first years of teaching

at William Grace Elementary in 1933-35. At that time, the school was part of the Noble School District. She then taught in Walled Lake and Detroit, before taking some time out to bear her two children—Diane and Robert.

In 1953, she went back to teaching at Middlebelt Elementary and later became involved in teaching special education. She took over the sight-seeing

room, allocated to teach a large number of youngsters with sight problems incurred in the early-'60s when too much oxygen was administered to premature infants.

AFTER EARNING an MA in special education, she became an at-large consultant to the district, and her most rewarding work is the accomplishments of her students, such as Laura Pappas, 1978 White Cane Queen.

"I'm very proud of these kids," she says with a smile that overwhelms her tiny face. "The greatest thrill for me is to see how well they do in spite of their handicaps."

Over the years she has seen special education develop, and she's particularly pleased with the mainstreaming concept, in which special students are integrated with other students in the schools.

"Socialization is one of the greatest things for all children," she explains. "Every child needs to learn to deal with others different than themselves."

She's seen education change in other ways. When she began teaching, district picnics were scheduled at the end of the year. Today, schools have individual picnics. But larger staffs have given rise to such needs as vocational

education. But she denies that the educational system has failed today's students.

"Years ago, kids who couldn't read dropped out, and that was considered OK, but now we insist as much as possible that they graduate."

She heartily approves of teaching to the "uniqueness of the child" rather than teaching the subject. And for teachers, or retirees, who refuse to change with the times, she has little sympathy.

"Some of them get in a rut and just stay there," she says. But she also prides herself on getting along with nearly everyone.

"I try to see the viewpoint of others, but I don't change my standards. But I do respect what they have to say," she adds.

Her fans throughout Farmington were evident when the special education department rented the Farmington Community Center to give Mrs. Briggs a retirement party last week. More than 200 persons showed up and she was presented with plaques and tributes, as well as a lot of hugs.

"I think there's still the warmth here in Farmington that there's always been," she says. "The new people that come in add a little spice."

HOME is a 54-year-old house filled with travel memorabilia and a yard of well-cultivated lilacs in the southeast section of Farmington Hills.

Her property was part of her grandparents' farm before it became the first area to be subdivided in Farmington after World War I. Unlike many others, she believes the area has improved tremendously, particularly since Farmington Hills became a city.

"We used to get stuck in the mud every time it rained," she recalls. Ditching, graveling, and "slag" treatment have improved the roads, she says. The older homes are hard to keep up sometimes, but there's an air of history in the area, she says.

Her family goes back quite a way as well. At Farmington's centennial, her mother's family won the prize for most graduates of Farmington High School; and Mrs. Briggs, and daughter Diane, a 1963 graduate, are counted among FIS alumni.

Those deep roots in the area inspired an active interest in Farmington's history, which is why she sits on the Farmington Historical Society and organized the Farmington Hills Historical Commission about five years ago. Recently, she joined the Oakland County Board of Commissioners. That group hopes to save a lot of time and energy for local groups seeking similar purposes.

And she's planning to pen a book updating Farmington's history since the centennial, if she can cram in some writing time over the next few years.

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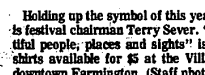
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T-shirt bonanza



Holding up the symbol of this year's Farmington Founders Festival is festival chairman Terry Sever. "Farmington is a treasury of beautiful people, places and sights" is the theme emblazoned on the T-shirts available for \$5 at the Village Goldsmith on Grand River in downtown Farmington. (Staff photo by Harry Mauths)

Teacher keeps popularity in spite of homework tasks

Ask any sixth grade student at Fairview Elementary School about George Gagniak and they're likely to answer, "He's the best teacher in the whole world."

At least that's the appraisal several students and alumni gave of Gagniak, 27, during a recent family party to the school. The Farmington School District is closing the school next week.

"When they say things like that, then you know you're doing a good job," grinned Cowan about the remark.

Doing a good job and enjoying his students seems to be Gagniak's teaching style.

At 5'7, he's a bit of a giant. He's got a friendly, easy-going personality. The kids expect it. They're competitive. They want a challenge," he said.

The cherub-faced teacher is waiting to be called back to work by the district after he was pinkslipped earlier this year.

He's looking for an administrative job in the district.

"In administration, I can share my ideas about teaching with others," he said.

In the meantime, the Southfield-based Gagniak will enjoy his seven acres of land in Hartland.

"I'll spend the summer cutting the grass. Once you finish the lawn, you have to go back and start over again," he joked.

The school, attended by Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield children, is the latest victim of declining enrollment.

One of the highlights of that party was a collection of slides taken during the last five years at Fairview by Gagniak. The slide show was set to music by Gagniak on his free time, according to Fairview principal Don Cowan.

One of the few complaints voiced about the teacher came from Margo Freedman, a sixth grader.

"Mr. Gagniak gives encyclopedia papers a lot, but other than that, he's a very good teacher," she said.

Although there is plenty of challenge, the curriculum is individualized, according to Gagniak.

"You treat them as individuals," he said of his students.

"I treat them as I would want to be treated. But I get a little upset when they don't do their work."

Gagniak knows most of the students in Fairview because it has a small enrollment. He takes care of the safety patrol and is an acting principal.

"I set their mind at ease. I tell them they are expected to do work they can do, not what their best friend can do," he said.

FAIRVIEW IS the second school in which he has taught since he began his teaching career six years ago. His first district was Monroe.

"It was a poor district. The building had three floors," he remembers of his first assignment. He transferred to the Farmington district and discovered that it was similar to the one in which he was raised.

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

*CRUTCHES AND CAST are now part of local Democratic activist ALDO VAGNOZZI'S attire. It seems that Aldo tore his Achilles tendon while playing volleyball. Imagine, after all these years of political battling and finally he wounds his Achilles heel, rather than a political foe doing it for him.

*SPEAKING OF politics, it's interesting to note that Farmington Hills Councilman JOE ALKATEEB is sporting a cigarette holder ala FDR. Could it be his political philosophy is swaying that way? The Inside Angles will keep you informed.


*A NOTE OF consternation was seen to pass over the faces of many incumbent Farmington Hills council members this week who are up for re-election next year. A familiar face showed up at this week's council meeting for the first time since she resigned her seat last January. Just imagine a council with five women members. Wouldn't that drive the city hall chauvinists mad?

*THREE INSTRUCTORS from Oakland Community College deserve a note of recognition for their recent accomplishments in the world of art. They recently won awards at the 2nd annual Michigan Watercolor Exhibition. They are DONALD MENDELSON, an art professor who garnered the \$200 Society Award for his painting "First Encounters"; ALICE NICHOLS, who won the show's top prize with a watercolor entitled "Where the Fern Grows"; and LINDA MENDELSON, a part-time instructor for her painting "The New Fribbit Box." Mrs. Nichols' painting will become a part of the Detroit Institute of Arts permanent collection. Her \$200 award was provided by the Drawing and Print Club of the Founders Society.


*LOOKING FOR some outdoor fun and friendship? Single Friends, a metropolitan adult Christian singles group, will host an evening under the stars starting July 7 from 8 p.m. to midnight at Rotary Park in Livonia. Six miles just east of Farmington Road. The Friday evening event will feature baseball, badminton, croquet, tennis and volleyball along with music. All a "sing-a-long." All single adults over 18 are welcome free of charge. Refreshments and buffet will be available. Single Point is an interdenominational singles group sponsored by Ward United Presbyterian Church. Monthly meetings are held the first and third Friday of the month.

*GEORGE STILL of North Farmington High School will direct the 1978 chorus of the Musical Youth International, an ensemble of 100 high school musicians from the Great Lakes region. The group will make Detroit its farewell concert before beginning its Central European concert tour. The farewell concert will be July 2 at the downtown St. Aloysius Church, 1234 Washington Boulevard, at 3 p.m. Admission is \$1. The group

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HUDSON'S

will begin its tour in Amsterdam and then go on to northern Germany. They will participate in the third Copenhagen International Festival. Other places to be visited are East and West Berlin, Vienna, Salzburg and southern Germany.

*INSIDE ANGLES tips its hat to Farmington's newest mom-in-law, JORETTA CONWAY, who admits that she had a few shaky moments since she was walking her daughter up the aisle recently. A consoling friend told her the story of a wedding in which almost everything went wrong. The bride's brother stepped on her veil and it was replaced so hastily that she went through the rest of the ceremony with a lodged hair piece. One of the bridesmaids started to faint during the ceremony. The bride did faint while walking back down the aisle after the ceremony.

*BLOOD DONATIONS are being sought by the Children's Leukemia Foundation in conjunction with the American Red Cross. The blood will be used to help blood disease patients. The blood mobile will be at the Leukemia Foundation headquarters on July 8, from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. It is located at 1922 Ten Mile. Southfield donors must be 17 years old and not older than 65. Donor screening criteria will be covered during the registration. All donations are on a volunteer basis. All donors must call 333-8222 for an appointment.

*BY THE WAY, this is LEUKEMIA MONTH in Michigan. The educational effort by the Children's Leukemia Foundation is to inform the public about the progress in leukemia research and treatment. The group allocates more than \$200,000 a year in research grants to hospitals and health care facilities throughout the state. Representatives of the foundation will be making appearances throughout the area during July. If your group is interested in having a speaker, call 343-2222.

*JOHN WITKOWSKI, of Farmington received a surprise recently when his daughter, MARY KATE, named her July's name in the Father's Day club, just sponsored by the Livonia Mall Merchants Association. He won two tickets to the 1978 Indianapolis 500 race, which includes round trip air fare.

*GOT A COMPLAINT? Up until a short time ago, the Better Business Bureau and prosecutor's office took the brunt of consumer complaints until they became overloaded. Now consumers can call the Oakland County Business Ethics Board at 336-6111 or 336-8777. Although the group is unable to take legal action, it has a high success rate of resolving complaints.

*Got a word or two you want to tell about a crime, the way it happened, or a fine and you're in the INSIDE ANGLE, P.O. BOX 9, SOUTHFIELD 48075.