

Teaching extends to homefront



Farmington teachers Karen and Glen Gearhart relax on the lawn of their Southfield home.

By Diane Hofstess
special writer

Adding their years together, this June marks the 45th year that Karen and Glen Gearhart of Southfield have been teaching in the Farmington School District.

English teacher Glen Gearhart, who always wears a three-piece suit to school, was an original cast member at North Farmington High School when it opened in 1961.

His wife, Karen, who is said to have the most challenging grading scale this side of the Mississippi River, started teaching English and French at North in 1962. She moved to Farmington High School in 1969, where she has been ever since.

Since 1961 some 8,000 Farmington teens have passed through their classrooms.

"I figured out one time," said Mrs. Gearhart, adjusting her bouffant hair, do, "that I only have a student for 52 hours of his life." That's the total number of hours a class meets over a semester. "That's not very much time, really."

So she and her husband have learned to teach in such a way that students are thinking about their classes after school hours — sometimes even 20 years after.

GILBERT PREUSS (sounds like "Price") was graduated from North 20 years ago. But, like a diligent student, the off-shore oil driller still corresponds with the Gearharts.

Dozens of others from different graduating classes still keep in touch with the Gearharts.

Seated in their plant-filled living that overlooks 140 rose bushes gracing their back yard, the green-thumbed teaching duo rattles off a list of students who still correspond with them.

Greg Semack, Class of '69. "He owns his own print business in Novi now."

Greg Murtaugh, Class of '76. "He's a petroleum engineer in Alaska."

Mary Colburn, Class of '74. "She was in the hospital when she was born."

Debbie Kasper, Class of '73. "She's a successful poet."

Jill Easthorpe. "She's a ballerina in Greenwich Village in New York."

Tob Clark, Ray Druce, Gaylen Curtis.

And the list goes on.

But the teachers have a rule that students can't visit them at home until after they graduate.

"There has to be a line," said Glen Gearhart. "You can't be buddy, buddy with them (when they are your students)."

Since the two began teaching, they have seen drastic shifts in student behavior.

"KIDS TODAY are very much like they were when we started teaching," said Mrs. Gearhart. They're back into sports and extracurricular activities after a swing away from these in the late '60s and '70s.

Following the national trend, "In the early '70s things fell apart in the schools," said Mrs. Gearhart. "Teachers were no longer valid idols, drugs were rampant and violence was the norm. It was like a contest to see who could take the most drugs and still come to class."

The couple described a 1969 student-led protest against the school dress code. The code prohibited wearing shorts to school and said that women could not wear slacks. Students refused to come to school and Channel 7 splashed it on the news.

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Murtaugh named to dean's list

Arlene Joan Murtaugh of Farmington Hills is among 106 students named to the dean's list for the spring 1984 semester at the University of Delaware.

Named to the dean's list are full-time students with a grade point average of 3.25 or above on a 4 scale with no temporary grades.

"They protested and got it changed, the way they did with a lot of things," said Mrs. Gearhart.

Those were the days, she says, when school was "uncool." Dances, clubs, band and sports all slacked off. Hardly anybody was trying out for cheerleading.

"Now I see things coming back," she said.

"School is a place to be again." And that's fine by the Gearharts. "We don't have to fight drugged students," said Mrs. Gearhart.

Kids today, they say, are concerned about grades — maybe too concerned in some cases — and they are more worldly. Most have jobs after school.

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