

Best of the best

'Grandma' serves up kindness to East students

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Whether it's custodial, clerical, emotional and, at times, financial — Helen Rebh is support personified.

East Middle School's custodian extraordinaire has been named Farmington Public Schools support staff person of the year.

And, Rebh was honored with the Oakland Schools' Betty Campion Distinguished Support Service Award. She was nominated by 70 people, including administrators, co-workers, teachers, students and community members.

"They're hitting me left and right this year with these honors and these surprise birthday parties," said Rebh, who recently celebrated her 70th birthday.

Rebh is a likeable target. Mostly, it's for the little things she does for her adopted brood, who call her Grandma.

Like searching through a dumpster with a student to find an orthodontic retainer accidentally chucked away.

Or, performing the role of Grandma in the song "Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer."

Her generosity is also marked by her lunchroom demeanor. When money lacks, "Grandma" picks up the slack.

"They'll say, 'Grandma, I forgot my lunch money.' I just tell them to tell the cashier, 'Grandma will take care of it,'" Rebh said. "They never take advantage of me. You'd be surprised how many

of them will come up and give me the money the next day."

She didn't earn the nickname Grandma for tolerating children's precociousness. She loves them.

Having raised three children on her own gives her special insight. Her husband, Joseph, died of heart problems in 1969 — a week after President John Kennedy was shot, Rebh noted.

Rebh didn't remarry. She refused to even date.

"All I was worried about was raising my kids," Rebh said. "I think I can say I made it."

Her son Joe Rebh is a Farmington Hills police sergeant. Her daughter Gloria is a nurse at St. Mary Hospital in Livonia and another daughter Veronica is a cafeteria worker for Warren Consolidated Schools. "She takes after her momma," Rebh said.

Rebh has been with Farmington schools since 1964. She started out in the cafeteria so she could see her children off to school and be home in time to greet them.

When her youngest reached 19, Rebh switched over to the custodial job at East Middle School.

She polices the lunchline like a traffic cop. Those who take cuts are directed to the back.

After lunch, she helps scrub the cafeteria and the kitchen. Rebh arrives in the morning and cleans the halls.

Said East Middle School principal Bill Mason: "She's one of those rare people you wish you had a whole lot more of."



They know her well: Helen Rebh stands in the East Middle School cafeteria. She says the kids call her "Grandma" and she calls them her angels.

Teacher hits home runs with her technique

East Middle School science and language arts teacher Darlene Egbert-Oliver likes to throw students a curve now and then.

Farmington District's Middle School Teacher of the Year seldom uses text books or other commercially produced study aids to prepare students. Instead, she prods their imaginations with exercises called "Cake-Quest," "Catnapped," and "Traveling with Honest Egbert."

Egbert-Oliver is rarely station-

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ary. "I wouldn't be able to find my desk," she said.

She's usually bouncing around desks to desk to encourage her students. Colleagues cite her for being dynamic, articulate and animated in her teaching.

She meets students' needs, they add in their nomination.

"I enjoy watching the kids' faces light up when they're doing a science experiment and they figure out what they're doing," Egbert-Oliver said.

She credits her seventh-grade science teacher Paul Wollin and 11th-grade humanities instructor Mary Beth Carroll for inspiring her.

Egbert-Oliver attended Plymouth-Canton Schools. She has a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and her master's from Michigan State University.

Egbert-Oliver joined Farmington schools in 1988.

She is a member of the Positive Climate Committee, the Student Assistance Team/Conflict Resolution Team, the Family Life Education Committee, and the Sixth Grade Writing Assessment Committee.

"I want (students) to enjoy and understand learning is fun," Egbert-Oliver said. "I want them to know they can do anything they want to do if they put their minds to it."



Darlene Egbert-Oliver

Rewards tip scale for teacher

Sandra Elling doesn't get emotionally taxed working with severely-impaired students. Rewards outweigh the negatives, she said.

"The biggest reward is being able to work with family and students and being able to accomplish goals you have set out," said Elling, who is the district's High School Teacher of the Year.

Elling has been a special education teacher with Cloverdale Developmental Training Center for 15 years. More so, she is a friend and an advocate to those students ranging 16-20 years in age.

Her philosophy is to treat those with disabilities as people first and having limitations second, according to those who nominated her.

"I guess you just attempt to look at your role," Elling said, "and try to be realistic in what you're doing."

"If you set a goal that is unattainable, both you and the child are going to get frustrated."

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Elling joined the district in 1979. She previously taught in Madison, Wis., and Lexington, Ky.

She's also been instrumental in having some special needs students integrated into regular classrooms. She was behind an award-winning cable TV series, "Kids-R-Kids," which illustrated



Sandra Elling

how students with disabilities can learn in a regular setting.

"With miracles of modern medicine, we're seeing students with more complex needs," Elling said. "You just try to do the same things . . . to meet their needs."

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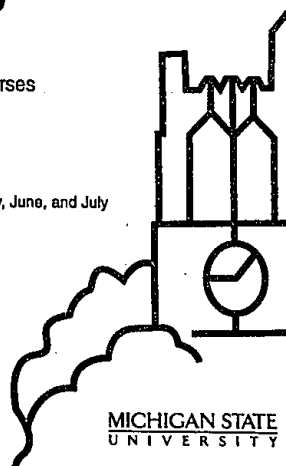
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High marks to Hillside teacher

David Hales is devoted to the craft of teaching, say those who know him. He's also described as warm, caring, enthusiastic, exciting and a lifelong learner.

Adjective-laden praise rolls from the tongues of colleagues, parents and students alike. And for good reason.

Hales, a teacher at Hillside, has been recognized as Farmington Public Schools' Elementary School Teacher of the Year.

Hales has been with the district since 1987. Both his bachelor's and master's degrees are from Michigan State University.

His lessons are well-organized and goals are clear, nominators said. He helps students think about today's world and their future with thought-provoking activities that go beyond textbook learning.

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Hales serves on numerous district and building committees that affect the way education is delivered to students.

One of his most noteworthy projects was developing a multicultural partnership with Fairbanks School in Detroit.

He also participates in staff de-



David Hales

velopment, peer coaching, mentoring, action research and in professional organizations.