

Heart

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Elementary School in the Farmington district.

So far, the 38-year-old Livonia resident has no qualms whatsoever about his career switch. To him, the payoff of being a steady role model who helps inspire and motivate young children — is far more important than the money.

"The money is important," conceded Stautler, who started out around the \$30,000 mark. "But it's not the sole reason for me doing what I do. It's about working with these kids, being the best educator I can be and ... helping each child that comes into my classroom leave with the skills they're going to need."

His energy level, enthusiasm for teaching, is something Beechview Principal Norma Jean Sasse quickly picked up on during 1997-98, when Stautler was a teaching assistant at the school. "He's wonderful," Sasse said. "He is enthusiastic and that's definitely catching on with the kids. He cares deeply about each and every one of those students. I'd say he really brings learning alive."

Even Stautler admits to being a little "goofy" or "ally" from time to time. But he knows when it's the right time for seriousness or shenanigans, such as portraying the Three Stooges — all three of them — during a school Halloween party last year. Describing his three-headed costume during a recent interview, "I was Larry, and Curly and Moe were on either side."

Positive mindset

Actually, the teacher likens his unbridled enthusiasm to a characteristic he thinks young people must try to develop in order to enjoy success in life. That's

having an "I can" attitude.

"The earlier the better," he said. For Stautler, the need to set goals and follow rules are other imperatives of a good elementary teacher should impart on pupils. The fact those things are coming from a man could turn out to be a bonus for children, some who do not have dads at home.

"Families no longer are mom and dad at home," he said. "There are a lot of single-parent households. And to have a (male) role model is a great benefit."

But as more children grow up without father figures on the home front, with the divorce rate usually estimated at 50 percent, it is even rarer for them to be taught by men during the formative, elementary school years.

Maybe it's because men think they can earn better livings in business, maybe because they are "intimidated" about having to nurture and be almost paternal to pupils all day, every day for nine months. But males who do go into teaching prefer middle and high schools, where it's more about teaching subjects they like.

Or, explained Stautler, "Some men I talked to said middle school and high school kids are more independent. You can have more adult conversations with those students. Maybe they think it's more of a manly or macho thing to be in middle school or high school" instead of elementary.

"Kids cry in elementary school," Stautler said. "You have to be a parent to these kids. You're a surrogate parent to these kids. You have to love them, good, bad or indifferent. And kids today come to school with all kinds of emotional baggage."

Stautler did say men have to be a lit-

tle more cautious than women about being "openly affectionate" with small children, given how society is so quick to judge people.

"They (pupils) come up and want to hug you," Stautler noted. "... I give a lot of high fives and pats on the head. I don't want to push kids away, either, but I don't want to send the wrong signal."

Father figure

In the mid-1990s, when Stautler decided he wanted to change careers, it didn't take long for the right signals to emerge, clearly steering him toward the education field.

Stautler's 6-year-old daughter Mallen attends second grade in the Livonia district. While a student at Madonna University, he did some volunteer work in her classroom and soon found out that he had a knack for helping children — and that he could make an impact on their lives.

"It dawned on me," he continued. "It finally crystallized in my heart and in my soul. Where I was going to have the greatest impact was in the classroom, being a dedicated teacher."

His ability to connect with his classroom kids is also bolstered by the fact he's a dad himself. "Being a parent adds another dimension I can draw on."

But Stautler emphasized that, for both men and women, teaching



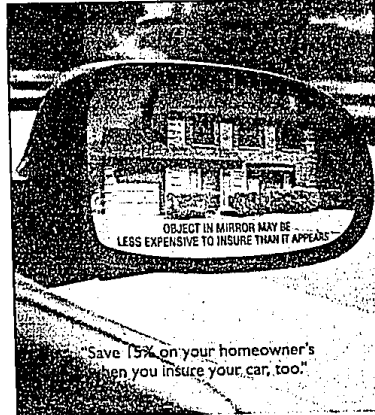
STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BUCKNER

Youthful attitude: Beechview Elementary School teacher Scott Stautler enjoys bringing enthusiasm and fun to the classroom.

talent and love of children are the ultimate requirements needed to lead elementary classrooms.

"Teaching is a very honorable profes-

sion," Stautler said. "Teachers, good teachers, have a greater impact on the kids they teach than virtually any other occupation. And that's why I'm here."



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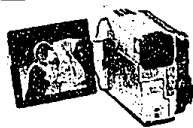
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