



# Villa Grove News

Serving Villa Grove, Camargo and the surrounding areas!

Vol. 111 No. 2

Wednesday, April 17, 2019

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**Side Tracks**

your express route to upcoming VG events

- 4/18-22 VG School Spring Break
  - 4/19 Good Friday Service of the Nails @ CUMC 7pm
  - 4/19 Good Friday
  - 4/21 Easter
  - 4/21 Ministerial Service Sunrise Service @ CUMC 7am
  - 4/21 Annual VFW Easter Egg Hunt @ Henson Park 2pm
  - 4/23 VG School Art Fair @6pm
  - 4/23 VG K-3 Spring Concert 6pm
  - 4/26 Special Olympics
  - 4/29 Special School Board Meeting @6pm
  - 4/30 Spring Band Concert Grades 5-12 @7pm
  - 5/4 Villa Grove VFW Loyalty Day Parade 10am Main Street, VG. Line up begins at 9am
  - 5/7 VGHS Honors Banquet
  - 5/8 VG School Early Dismissal 1:30
  - 5/8 VG Booster Club 6pm
  - 5/9 Spring JH & HS Choir Concert @ 7pm
  - 5/10 Blue Devil Classic
  - 5/11 VGHS Prom
  - 5/12 Mother's Day
  - 5/13 PTO Meeting @ 630om
  - 5/17-18 Villa Grove Town Wide Garage Sales
  - 5/18 Countryside United Methodist Church Flea Market 7am-2pm
  - 5/18 Camargo Township District Library Kids Prom for Pre-K - 3rd Grade 6-7pm
  - 5/23 Villa Grove School 8th Grade Promotion
  - 5/27 Memorial Day
- If you have an upcoming event that you would like to see featured in Sidetracks, email us at [vgnews@mchsi.com](mailto:vgnews@mchsi.com) or call us at 832-4201

## Westray: A Special Person Looks Back on a Special Career

By Tony Hooker Staff Writer

When I approached Karla Westray, whose career as a teacher at Villa Grove High School is coming to an end at the end of the current school year, about being interviewed, she initially demurred. However, as is her fashion, she deliberated for a while before deciding that an interview would be an opportunity to promote the special education program at VGHS. Those who know her well won't find this surprising. With Mrs. Westray, others always come first. Whether it's her school, her family or the iconic main street business that they run, JR's, the needs of others are always of utmost importance to her. It's what makes her so good at so much. I recently got her to take a few minutes to reflect on a career that has spanned 3 decades, all at Villa Grove High School.

How would you define the moment that's about to occur? Are you ending one career and starting a new one?

I wouldn't really call it starting a new one. I'm retiring from a career that I've known I wanted to pursue since I was a junior in high school.

Let's start at the beginning then. Where did you go to high school?

I graduated from Edwards County High School, in Albion, Illinois. I got my bachelor's degree from SIU=Edwardsville.

You knew that you wanted to be a teacher in high school. Did you know that you wanted to work in special education?

When I was in high school, I was very big into all the classes that are like home ec. At our high school, there was actually a pre-school and the kids in our child development class, starting our sophomore year, were able to run it. The 3-year olds came two days a week, and the 4-year olds came two, and as a sophomore, you were a classroom helper. As a junior, you were a head teacher, and then as a senior, the Child Development teacher chose four people to be supervisors. So, my sophomore year, I was a helper, my junior year I was a head teacher, and my senior year, I was a supervisor and along those three years, probably during my junior year, I found that there were kids that struggled to learn, and I found myself drawn to them, and wanting to help them. When I graduated from high school, I knew I wanted to be a teacher in special ed. As a high school student, I worked in a bowling alley in the

snack area and one evening a friend who worked at the local newspaper came in to get a burger and shake and said "It must be nice having your four years of college paid for." I said "Yep, that sure would be nice," <laughing> and he said "Well, since you're getting it..." I told him I had no idea what he was talking about and he informed me that they had gotten a press release that day, stating that I had been awarded a scholarship through the Regional Office of Education. The next day I got a letter telling me that I had received it, and to come to the R.O.E. office to claim it. To this day, I don't recall ever applying for it! It paid for my tuition at pretty much any four-year institution I wished to attend, and I had a cousin who lived near SIU-E and offered to let me live with the family. At the time, SIU-E was more of a commuter school, so I lived with the family for a year on their farm before I moved to campus.

Was Villa Grove your first teaching job?

When I get out of college, believe it or not, I was pretty shy and didn't feel I had the confidence to teach in a school district. I wasn't ready to move back to my home town, West Salem, so I moved up here to St Joseph, with some family, and I got a job at Kinder-Care in Urbana and I taught private kindergarten for two years, there. My third year, I worked my way up to assistant director, and I loved it because they had kids from newborns all the way up to 10 or 11 years old. I loved doing it, but I knew what I had gotten a scholarship to go to school for, and they weren't able to give you any benefits, so I decided it's time to move on and I literally opened the News-Gazette and saw that Villa Grove had an opening for a special education teacher. That was when they were changing to departmentalized special education, in 1987, and were hiring a couple teachers. I called and had the application sent to me, filled it out and came down and got an interview. The interview was great, and then next day, Frank Norris called and offered me the job and I haven't left since.

That was in 1987?

Yes, the spring of '87. I can't tell students that, because it doesn't usually happen that way. It was the one and only school district I ever applied to!

Serendipity!

I've been there ever since. I've had one interview! It's funny because when I got the job, I told my mom that Villa Grove looked really familiar,



Karla Westray

like there was just something about the four-way stop. She said that's because my grandmother was actually born in Camargo and when I was very small, she had a best friend, Mae Brown, who lived in Villa Grove, and my mom would bring her up to stay with Mae for a few days and I would always ask to come with her.

You mentioned how the special education role has changed over the years. Would you talk a little bit more about that?

Sure. A long time ago, <laughs> talk about a long time and I've been teaching for 30 years, but before that, special education was self-contained, mostly in a classroom. It gradually moved to a point where students needed some resource time, maybe some tutoring or guidance in some classes. Eventually, they found that kids needed direct service in academics at the high school level, and that's when we started teaching English, and Science and Math, and the kids were actually going class-room to class-room, just like every student in the high school.

Which area did you teach?

I've taught every area. I've taught Math, English, Science and Geography, but a lot of my focus over all the years has been Math. I've been lucky enough to have my own classroom, teaching all the way from foundational math clear up through juniors. I've been allowed to be in the gen-ed classroom as a co-teacher, so I've really learned a lot from those teachers. I've worked with student council for about fifteen of the thirty two years I've been at the school. I did it when I first began, and then stepped out of it for a while when my kids were involved in their activities. Once they didn't need me around so much, I was able to do it again. I've probably been involved in fifteen or sixteen homecomings! Walt Wright was a big role model and mentor for me. He really helped me come out of my shell and get more involved with students in ways other

than in the classroom. He and I were heavily involved in the "Prevention" group, and there were a couple of summers where he and I did workshops over at ISU, teaching kids how to use puppets and put on skits. That was when the DARE programs were really strong all the way through the grade levels. I've served on a lot of school improvement committees. I think I'm working under my sixth superintendent and my eighth principal. I've unfortunately seen several of my co-workers pass away.

When I was in school, kids from all over the county would come to Villa Grove for Special Education classes. That's no longer the case?

When I started, the high school had a work training program, and the vocational program was a big draw. About fifteen years ago, each of the schools started looking at the finances of that, and then discovered that they could have a program at their own school, keeping them in their district, at a cost that was less than transporting them and sharing the costs of teaching them here. It kind of phased out then.

The vocational training went away, as well?

Yes, but now when I look at it, I see a need for life skills for the special education kids. Kids who have a need for it can stay in the school district until the day before they turn twenty-two, but in a rural area like this, there are real limits on what we can offer after that. I think it would be a great thing to see if Villa Grove could put in a life skills program for that older group. Maybe it would draw in students from other districts again. I could see a situation where history would repeat itself, in that fashion.

How much has teaching changed over the course of your career?

You're always going to have issues regarding discipline. There will always be kids who will try and break the rules. Maybe some won't try as hard as they could. Technology has made a huge difference. Communication skills have seemed to diminish. There is a lack of an ability to have a conversation, because of social media. They're staying up really late at night, not that kids didn't before, and they're really tired when they come to school. We always worked, but a lot of kids are working fast

food jobs now that are later in the evening. Kids haven't really changed a lot. They still do well with consistency and structure. As one of the veterans out there, the kids sometimes think I'm older and grouchy, but really I've just never changed my ways. I'm not going to turn my head to something I shouldn't. All three of my kids graduated from Villa Grove High School, and I was happy to share that experience with them.

Did that ever cause any issues?

Nothing major, really. I know they probably have taken the guff about being a teacher's kid, but it was easier for them to come and get money if they needed it! I always tried to hold them accountable, like any parent would. The school has changed, physically. We went from keys to card keys. There are cameras everywhere, now. The different training that we receive now compared to when I first started amazes me.

We have a school resource officer now. Back in my day, Mr. Powell was enough to scare me straight!

I've had so many great mentors over the years. You mention Danny Powell. Frank Norris. Doris Dunn was my first mentor, she was a special ed teacher, and she's just a wonderful person. I can't name them all. When I first came here, there were close to 10 married couples who either taught or worked at the school in another capacity. That's twenty people! That's another thing that's changed. We still have a few, but a lot of our teachers live out of town, now. That would be one thing I would encourage the younger faculty members to try. Even if you live out of town, get yourself to Villa Grove when there are things going on. In the fall, come to Ag Days. The little kids will see you and they'll love it! My first year, I lived in Champaign, back before cell phones, and we used to find out about snow days on the radio or through our phone tree. I left around 6:45 and made it all the way to the last curve north of town before I heard them announce that Villa Grove had closed. I knew that Evelyn Hutchison would still be in the office and it was pay day, back in the days before direct deposit, so I came on in and picked up my check. It took me an hour and a half to make it **Cont. pg. 8**

## Camargo Township Library: Story Times; 100 Years of Children's Books With Guest Readers

Library News:

Mark your calendars; the library has some fun things coming up in April and May.

In April our story time, which is every Thursday 3:30 to 4, will spotlight real life super heroes! On Thursday April 4th Beth and Ross Elston were here to talk about answering 911 calls. Thursday April 11 Daphne Piercy was here to talk to the kids about visiting the doctor's office. On April 18 we take a break from our super heroes so the kids

can have an Easter egg hunt during story time. And last but not least Jones dental will be showing the kiddos how to take care of their choppers.

The month of May will be just as action packed as April: Our library will be joining in the celebration of 100 years of Children's books. We kick off with local author Jean Forsythe reading her book "Riding on a Train, What a Way to Go". Then on Sat May 4th the kid's can enjoy a pancake breakfast while they listen to

Sarah read "If You Give a Pig a Pancake" (they are invited to wear their Pajamas). On Saturday May 18, 2019 from 6 to 7 pm we will have a kid's prom. Ross and Beth Elston will be playing some fun music for families to come and boogie to. We will have refreshments and a photo booth.

Spread the news Summer Reading is coming in June. Stayed tuned for our upcoming fun Tuesdays in June from 10 to 11:30.

By Kent A. Stock - Staff Writer

In December 2017, fifteen of the nineteen members in the Little Okaw Valley Conference voted to leave the league for the 2019 - 2020 school year. It was always known that this group would form a new conference only the name was in question.

The four schools remaining in the LOVC (Martinsville, Palestine, Hutsonville and Oblong) made the determination to keep the conference label, they had the rights to the name, even though none of the schools were original members and three of the four joined the conference just five years ago.

Recently a new name was recommended at a princi-

pal's meeting for the then unnamed group. The Lincoln Prairie Conference was recommended to the administrations of the fifteen member schools. The vote was unanimous to move forward as the LPC for the upcoming school year.

"ALAH is sad to lose the name LOVC but feel great about staying in a conference with some old alliances," said Arthur Lovington Atwood Hammond High School Assistant Principal and Athletic Director Jared Vanausdoll. "Adding regular season conference games with old rivals like Villa Grove and Tri-County is a plus for us. We continue to feel comfortable with our place in the new Lincoln Prairie Conference and know our **Cont. pg. 8**

**VFW ANNUAL**

**EASTER EGG Hunt**

Easter Sunday April 21

The Event Will Start at 2:00pm • Henson Park By The Ball Diamond

Three age groups:  
Preschool-kindergarten • 1st and 2nd grade • 3rd and 4th grade  
Three prizes - one in each age group

**ONE HUNDRED DOZEN PLASTIC EASTER EGGS**

Filled with candy will be hidden for the children to find!

