



RETIREE SHOWCASE

GAY DIDGET



MS. DIDGET

- Her 31 year teaching career began as a Grade 6 English/Social Studies teacher at West Irondequoit Central School



Today we continue the retiree showcase for our honored colleague, Ms. Gay Didget.

Ms. Didget completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Hamilton College, where she played volleyball and rugby in addition to her studies. She went on to complete a Master's of Education from Nazareth College. Her 31 year teaching career began as a Grade 6 English/Social Studies teacher at West Irondequoit Central School. She then taught for 4 years at Marymount International School in Rome, Italy before returning home to the United States for a position teaching English 9-11 at Greece Athena High School. Her teaching adventure then took her to Calkins Road Middle School and then joining the Chautauqua Lake family after marrying and moving to Chautauqua. For the last seven years, she has taught AIS math (with some reading) at Chautauqua Lake. In her teaching career, she has taught nursery school, third grade, sixth grade (ELA and social studies combined), seventh grade English, and high school English including AP Language and Composition. She noted that given her last name, perhaps it was inevitable that she would one day teach math.

Ms. Didget grew up in a family of teachers. Her mom's parents were music teachers, her mom was a music teacher, her aunt was a music teacher, her uncle was a teacher/coach/principal/superintendent, as well as four of her five cousins. She believes that, "when you grow up around good teachers, there is an inherent understanding in what a life in teaching means. It isn't a nine-to-five job. The financial rewards are not what other careers offer, but I can't imagine having pursued any other career." Ms. Didget's first taste of teaching was as a gymnastics coach. She fondly remembers the smiles of the kids when they learned something new. "That spark of learning -be it a physical skill or a new understanding of a math skill - has always been one of the best parts of my job!"

When asked about a favorite memory, Ms. Didget noted that it would be impossible to pick just one. "The images that come to mind fall into three categories: kids, colleagues, and... Italy. There are so many classes, so many kids, so many colleagues whom I recall with great fondness. I have several students who grew up to become teachers, and that gives me great satisfaction. In 1999, I was honored to receive my school's Excellence in Education award. To have been recognized by colleagues for whom I had enormous respect remains a career highlight. While I absolutely loved - loved - that job, those kids, and those colleagues, I left to teach in Italy. I spent four years teaching at an international school in Rome. What a wonderful adventure! The memories from that magical time are among my favorites." Most memorable was a field trip taking seventh graders on a five-day trip to Napoli (Naples). Gay shared, "the adventures included visits to the archeological site of Pompeii and a Naples underground tour - a tour of the caverns and passageways under the city. Fascinating and fun! One of the teachers at our school had his doctorate in art history. I volunteered to chaperone any field trip he led!"



When asked about a favorite fun fact to teach Ms. Didget shared, “(I’m not sure it’s a fun fact, but...) When I was growing up, math did not come easily for me. I remember struggling to learn my facts - both addition and multiplication. My mom did all she could to help me. I love teaching kids the rhyme she taught me, “Four and seven make eleven.” I also struggled to learn $8 \times 7 = 56$. My mom wrote it on my breakfast napkin. She wrote it on my brown paper lunch bag. She wrote it on an index card and taped it to the bathroom mirror. I’m sure I will forget a lot of things in my life, but that fact will be one of the last things to leave me! My students now see that fact and ask, “Is this the one your mom taught you?” or “Is that the one you could never remember?” I love that that story lives on with them.”

Gay goes on to share that “the best part of my job is the relationships formed with my students and my colleagues. It is a magical thing to be an every (school) day presence in a child’s life. Some of my dearest friends are fellow teachers. I have great appreciation for their compassionate listening and sage counsel. Louann Heslink has been a wonderful mentor, an endless source of wisdom, and a cherished friend. She has so generously shared her knowledge and expertise with me and with so many others in the school. Being able to share a room with her has been a comfort and a joy in these seven years!” Mrs. Heslink echoes those sentiments in sharing, “Gay is one of the most compassionate and dedicated teachers that I ever had the privilege of working with! She always puts her students first and goes above and beyond to help them become successful. If a student doesn’t succeed with the strategies she teaches, she will continue to research until she finds one that works for that particular student. As a colleague, she was always supportive, trustworthy, and thoughtful. She will truly be missed as an intervention specialist, coworker, but more importantly, friend!”

Friend and colleague, Holly Snyder goes on to share, “From the moment Gay steps in the classroom, her compassionate and positive nature radiates throughout the entire room. Her students and colleagues are always greeted with a kind word and smile, and she always puts the needs of her students first. Her willingness to offer advice, collaborate, and lend a listening ear as a colleague and friend will be greatly missed. It is truly an honor to know Gay and to have learned alongside her for many years in the classroom. She is the epitome of the quote, “A truly great teacher is hard to find, difficult to part with, and impossible to forget.”

Elementary Principal, Megan Lundgren, shares, “When you think of Ms. Didget, the first thing that comes to mind is her warm smile, compassionate demeanor and constant professionalism. The care she shows for her students is unwavering and always evident. The district was very fortunate when Ms. Didget accepted a full-time position, particularly at the start of a very uncertain time in education. She approached challenges with the utmost grace, patience, and positivity. She has been an asset to our math department and school and will be greatly missed!”

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Gay’s plans for retirement include longer visits with grandchildren in Texas, Vermont, and Massachusetts. Gay especially looks forward to time spent traveling with her husband, a favorite pastime, and enjoying many more adventures together. She adds, “When we’re home in Chautauqua, retirement will allow me more time to swim, more time to read, and more time to work on my (at this point in time) very sad golf game!” Her teaching philosophy becomes her words of wisdom for new teachers. “Kindness and consistency are two important qualities - in life, but especially in teaching. So many kids need a consistent, kind presence to help them along their way.” The Chautauqua Lake family has indeed been blessed by Gay’s abundance of kindness and consistency. We wish her all the best in her next adventures!