

Neskowin Valley School head of school reflects on school year
By Kendall S. Cable Of the News-Times



Lainie Koch, Neskowin Valley School head of school. (Photo by Kendall S. Cable)

As the whoosh of a flamethrower incinerated weeds outside of Neskowin Valley School Monday, Head of School Lainie Koch sat at her desk behind an Apple notebook, readying herself for the next rush of children to enter the doors of the former dairy barn.

Koch, who began teaching at the school in 1979, stepped up to the head role in August 2006 at the board of trustee's urging. She also has continued to teach preschool and kindergarten halftime.

"My first reaction was 'no way' because I knew from teaching at the school for many years that it was a very demanding job," Koch recalled about her new position. "I wasn't sure that was something that I wanted."

After her husband, Randall, was asked to become the school's community relations coordinator, Koch said she thought about her love for the school and the time she invested into it up to that point. She also thought about her son, Aaron, going off to college, leaving her to become an empty-nester.

She accepted.

After the first year, Koch reflected on her decision.

"I would say that as in any new job, there were parts of it that went really smoothly and there were some rough spots as well," she evaluated. "There were lots of parts of the job that I enjoyed, then there are parts that seem like there is always something that needs to be dealt with right now.

"I put in a tremendous number of hours. There was just always something to do. At the end of every day, I went home and I still worked some more."

In retrospect, Koch said the school looked and felt great even though she didn't sleep much.

Koch leveled that as a rural, independent school where there is a small population and "the socioeconomic base is relatively low," challenges arise. Some of these challenges involve pinpointing families who desire to make their children's educational experience a priority.

She expressed gratitude for a network of friends who help to make the school an option aside from public schools through their generous donations. She added the school recently received two \$20,000 grants - one for student financial aid from Williams and Dame Development, Portland, and one from the Hillman Foundation to address the facility.

When asked about the impact the new head of school left during her first year, Randall said she brought with her authenticity. He added she brought history with her because of her affiliation with the school practically since it was established in 1972.

Koch recalled one of her most memorable moments throughout these years was when a student with a prosthetic leg was playing soccer. The boy, who had attended the school for several years, kicked the soccer ball, launching his prosthetic leg into the air.

Koch ran out to the boy and asked if he was okay. Her concern was answered with, "Yeah, thank goodness it wasn't he other leg."

Koch said the story demonstrates how comfortable the student felt at the school and how accepted he was by his peers.

The concern she has for her students was obvious when Koch was asked what she is looking forward to the most for the upcoming year, "seeing the children, hearing the children, interacting with the children, and experiencing their exuberance and interest and excitement about learning."

Randall said these children learn from Koch's example in reference to the pride she exudes.

"The school has become more beautiful, reflecting her care," Randall said. "The pride that she has in the school is very contagious, so people take care of it more. I think that works for the children as well. They care more about it as well."

He added Koch has added beautifully-displayed artwork and makes sure that recycling and communication takes place.

"I am an ardent recycler and one of my least favorite things is wasting things," she said.

As for the upcoming school year, Koch said her goals are to increase enrollment, which she predicts to be an estimated 60 students this year.

She and Randall also look forward to working with the school's newest teacher, Amy Henderson, who is to teach 6th through 8th grades.

"We are very excited about not only her connection to Oregon, but her desire to be back here after being away and traveling, going to China and being in the Midwest and then coming back to this area. That is part of the excitement," Randall said.

According to a press release, Henderson was raised in Beaver Creek, moved to China, Hong Kong and Mongolia for several years, and then earned a bachelor's degree in art from the University of Oregon. She has experience in environmental education and is to teach Mandarin.

To kick off the new school year and meet the staff, a back to school picnic is to be held Aug. 26 for

new and returning families. School is to begin Sept. 5 with a parent orientation to follow Sept. 6.

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