

VC ECHOES

Volume 13, Issue 6

Valley Central Teachers' Association

Retiree Edition June 2011

VALLEY CENTRAL'S RETIREE CLASS OF 2011



THE VCTA HEARTILY CONGRATULATES ALL OF
VC'S 2011 RETIREES FROM ALL BARGAINING
UNITS! BEST WISHES FOR A HAPPY AND
HEALTHY RETIREMENT!

There are no greater advocates for children and education than teachers and teacher unions.

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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In this issue:

Retiree Service	2
Jim Allen	3
Seasons of Jim	4
Mary Bleau	5
Sandy Carroll	6
Joe DeVenuto	7
Farewell, Mr. D!	8
Donna Lloyd	9
Dear Donna	10
Angela Colonna	11
Angela Colonna	12
Gayle Gridley	13
Ruth Keller	14
Linda Kirkpatrick	15
Bonnie Sanchez	17
Colleen Sirna	19
Mac's Musings	20

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- The VC Echoes is the official publication of the Valley Central Teachers' Association—Local 3076—and is published regularly during the school year. Any articles submitted to the VC Echoes will also be posted on the VCTA web site.*



Did You Know?

Valley Central's Retiree Class of 2011 has served the students and the community for over **290 years!**



Jim Allen Retires After 41 Years at VC

“Putting Children Center” – the motto of the Valley Central Teacher’s Association is one that Mr. James Allen has lived up to over the past 40 years.

Mahatma Gandhi said “Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment, full effort is full victory.” Jim Allen has given full effort these 41 years. He constantly strives to perfect his presentation of knowledge to his students. Whether it is spinning the wheel of prizes in class or through thrilling demonstrations, he bridges the gap of understanding difficult scientific concepts. He works hard and expects the same from his students so they all achieve full victory.

Jim grew up in Pennsylvania where he attended Lock Haven State and received his teaching degree in May 1970. Right out of college, Jim was hired by the Valley Central School District to teach 8th grade Science. Since the fall of 1970, Jim has remained a part of the middle school and has taught 8th grade Science. During his career, Jim has also been an active member of the union. During two different teacher contracts, Jim was a member of the negotiating committee. Jim was also a building representative for numerous years and served as the Vice President of the Union for two terms. Over the last few years, Jim has also been the advisor for the Games Club at the Middle School.

Jim has a drive to work with young teachers to make their transition into the profession smoother. As many new teachers know, Jim is a big proponent of Harry K. Wong and his methods of classroom management. As an "old dog who learned new tricks", several years ago Jim learned of H.K. Wong and incorporated many of Wong's ideas into his own classroom with much success. Jim realized that the practical approaches of H.K. Wong to classroom management were something that was lacking from the training of new teachers. As a result of that revelation, Jim started to

work with the Viking Induction program, the annual summer training that Valley Central School District provides for its new teachers. It was one of the ways Jim helped to ensure that new teachers discovered H.K. Wong's strategies early in their career, and also a way for Jim to give back to the career he has enjoyed for over 40 years.

Jim has shared many memorable teaching moments; one of those moments took place during one of his first years at Valley Central. Jim was getting ready to leave school for the day when he noticed a student outside and smoking. As Jim was approaching the student, the student quickly put the cigarette in his vest. Jim approached the student and questioned him and when the student denied the smoking, Jim quickly took the student to the office. While on the way to the office, the student’s vest began to smoke. Even after this, the student continued to deny the allegation and Jim left him with the principal.

Since the fall of 2002, I have had the honor of teaching next door to Jim Allen. He has been a mentor and friend. I have been fortunate enough to have had the privilege of sharing Jim’s expertise, work ethic and commitment. One of the most memorable moments was being able to present a project we had designed at the New York State Science Teacher Conference. Jim has left a remarkable legacy behind and one which will remain with Valley Central for years to come. I will miss Jim who has been my colleague, a professional, a confidant, a friend, a wise counselor, a visionary, a leader and indeed an outstanding educator.

Remember VC fondly and may the years that lie ahead be filled with laughter and happiness. This is our wish for you as we say "so long" but not farewell.

*Contributed by:
Melanie Belgiovene
Joseph Fracalossi
Christine O’Shea*

The Seasons of Jim Allen

I have had the pleasure of spending the last twenty-nine years working with Jim Allen - - with about half of that time period finding us working on the same eighth grade academic team. It has been a long, hard journey filled with the usual trials, tribulations, and triumphs that any public school teacher faces. Yet, throughout the years, Jim has truly been a man for all seasons. Let us sample some of this journey as we bid him farewell and good luck in his retirement.

The Beginning: Jim's family moved around a bit when he was growing up, but he mostly hails from Pennsylvania. After finishing high school, he went to school at Loch Haven State College. After graduation, he began to teach at Valley Central in 1970 and has spent the last forty-one years teaching science, and occasionally fly-fishing, to the district's school children. Along the way, he also found the time to wed one of the district's former math teachers and the Valley Central Middle School's first computer teacher, Marietta (Pomarico) Allen.

The New Compost for Education and other Educational Endeavors: During his life's journey, Jim has seen many changes - - some good, some bad - - in education (team teaching, the New Compact for Education, Effective Schools, and etc.). However, James Allen has never been an educational fad. He is always prepared for his students; he brings his "A" game every day. Although he takes his subject matter seriously, Jim has never been afraid to make learning science a fun thing to do. Using early Apple II E computers to run a simulation of organisms in their habitat to study/observe, creating your own perfume or cologne, or building roller coaster projects are just a few examples of creative and pleasurable lessons that Mr. Allen has offered to his students.

Somewhere in the passing years, Jim and I have both learned that middle school students also have a strange "charm." What else can you do but smile (after chasing the students back into class) when one of your students has

learned how to imitate the dismissal bell from the old middle school bell system and gotten the whole class out a minute early. There are also those moments when, against all odds, middle school students come through for you, like the students helping out during Mr. Allen's team quest to raise funds to purchase the flag-pole for the middle school complex.

The Future: I wish Jim the very best in retirement. I hope that he finds time to do a bit more fly-fishing than he has been able to do while teaching. There is also a classic MG sports car that is awaiting his attention. May he find the time to relax and enjoy these and any other retirement endeavors that he chooses to pursue. May God bless you and keep you, Jim; it has been great working with you!

—Joe DeVenuto
V.C.M.S. Eighth Grade Blue Team



Mary Bleau Retiring From VCMS

Twenty five years ago, Mary Bleau began her new career as a Spanish teacher in Marlboro, coming to VC the following year. She will tell you that that was not what she'd planned to do. But sometimes life takes turns that we don't expect, and for the thousands of students that have had the opportunity to sit in her class, the turn Mary's life took was a blessing. I know that there are many, many students whose lives have been touched by this amazing woman.

When you enter Mary's classroom, the colorful blankets, sombreros, prints of famous paintings and posters on the walls make you feel welcome and warm. *¡Bienvenidos!* one poster reads, welcoming everyone who enters. And Mary stands in the doorway, ready to greet all of her students.

Mary is an incredible teacher. She fills her lessons with fun and diverse activities and she really allows her students to enjoy themselves in what can be a scary new class – the dreaded foreign language. She begins each year by promising the students that they can and will be successful if they do their work. She goes above and beyond for all of her students. She comes in early to work with them before school, eats her lunch in the classroom so that if anyone needs her, she'll be there ready to help them, and she stays late for extra help whenever a student asks. Every year, we end up with a "lunch bunch." They're a mix of her students, my students and sometimes kids we don't even teach. They spend their lunch period with us, eating, talking, sometimes doing homework, but always laughing.

Mary is a wonderful person. She gives her time to her students. If a child is hungry, she tosses them an apple. If someone is thirsty, she hands over a bottle of water. And if a student couldn't afford to go on a field trip with their classmates, she'd open her checkbook.

Mary is an invaluable mentor. In 1999, I had the privilege of student teaching with Mary.



She welcomed me with open arms and an open plan book and really let me try new things. She was so helpful and honest and I valued her guidance more than she'll ever know. I know there were student teachers before me and several after me who will say the same thing.

Mary is a treasured friend. Though we're just a few years (and two days!) apart in age, Mary has become one of my closest friends. Since the first day that I met her as a student teacher, I've been able to talk to her about everything. She was a sounding board for wedding plans, helped with my final project for my Master's degree and was the first person outside of my family to find out that I was expecting – both times! We've spent time outside of school together and have always had a blast. People around the school have joked that we're always together...and it may be true. (cont'd on pg 6)

Mary Bleau Retiring From VCMS (from page 5)

I always say in September that I've missed laughing with her over the summer. Our minds are so similar; a look from one of us to the other can begin a fit of laughter. We think alike and so many times have said or done the same thing at the same time. So many times, we've laughed ourselves silly.

Mary is an amazing grandmother. Mary's pride and joy are her three grandsons. Her daughter Tracey's children, Darryl, Dylan, and Donovan are the lights of her life. She spends her evenings and weekends at school functions and has probably attended more soccer games than most coaches have! She is a full-service "Grammy" and helps with homework and projects, too. Mary's son, Erik, is also so lucky to have a mother like her. She is always willing to help him out with whatever he needs as well. I'm sure that her involvement with her grandchildren will only grow in her retirement.

She's looking forward to getting more in-

involved with her church, spending time with her friends and traveling. She has talked about going back to nursing. (Oh, did I forget to mention that for many, many years, on Friday afternoons she would change into her scrubs and go to her second job as a nurse at Castle Point?) Maybe she'll teach a few piano lessons. (She was a piano major at Hartwick College – is there anything she can't do?!)

VCMS is going to miss Mary's commitment to excellence in the classroom. Future students are going to miss out on some dynamite instruction. I'm just going to miss her!

In September, while the classes are beginning and the routines are starting again, Mary will be on a cruise in the Mediterranean. I hope her retirement is full of nothing but smooth sailing. She deserves it!

—*Respectfully submitted by Kelly Napoleon, VCMS*

Hey Sandy...Retirement Looks Good On You!

How do you know you are in the presence of a great teacher? If you have ever experienced Sandy Carroll interact with students, you'll know. It has been an honor and a privilege to work with Sandy. She has an amazing gift in the way she can make the most mundane topic come to life. Sandy has been a motivator and a great support to numerous students and staff.

Sandy began her career teaching in a regular education class in the state of Alaska. It wasn't long before the Valley Central School District was lucky enough to hire her as a full time teacher where she has spent the majority of her career. She has been known to make characters "come alive" by doing things such as dressing up as "Miss Nelson" from the book Miss

Nelson is Missing.

Sandy creates an atmosphere that is filled with exploration and creativity for her students. A student never knows what

he or she may find at their seat. It could be a seed with a magnifying glass to explore or a

(cont'd on pg 10)



Joe DeVenuto: A True “Person for Others” Retires

I have had the honor and privilege of working with Joe DeVenuto for many, many years. During those years Joe has quietly done many things to improve the education of students, affect the lives of teachers and aid in the good work of the union. Joe doesn't call attention to his contributions and achievements.

When Joe received the Founders' Award in 2008, we were reminded of the many things that he has done. I read each issue of the VC Echoes cover to cover, but had somehow missed Joe's byline on several articles highlighting, of course, the success and achievements of others. Many of us are aware of Joe's many years of service as a building representative, but were unaware of his being the VCTA Representative to the Hudson-Catskill Central Labor Council. I know about this work because Joe would comment to me about how difficult times were for our brother and sister union members throughout the Hudson Valley. Speaker after speaker at the Founders' Award ceremony emphasized Joe's work ethic and humility.

During my years of working with Joe, he has from time to time reminded us that he was, "just a recycled Toyota mechanic." This comment would then be followed with an insight or alternate solution that always made me think, "I wish I had thought of that." This is particularly true of how Joe identifies a problem that a student has and develops the steps needed to help the student overcome it. His alternate view extends to classroom management: he studies the sports pages so that he can start class by talking to one of our likeable but lively students with a few comments about the Yankees, and so captures the students' attention for the rest of the period.

Joe has supported and worked with other teachers throughout the years. He has been our team leader for many years and through many changes in personnel, gently guiding us through easy and tough parent conferences, student recommendations, ideas for

solving problems, and always moving us forward. During the time that our team was raising the money for the flag pole, Joe worked at every fund raising event, constantly adding his experience to help make the project a success. This included using his knowledge of masonry to be sure to take down the flag after the Flag Day ceremony so that the concrete base could cure properly.

Joe and I have over the years exchanged stories of amusing and remarkable things that middle school students do. One of his amusing stories took place before the middle school and high school were connected. Four girls cut out of school through a door that at the time was located at the east end of the building. The girls were headed west. Joe saw them and ran to his room to cut them off. He looked out his window expecting to see them—first left, then right—no girls. He then looked down to see the four girls belly crawling below his window. Joe yelled, "Boo!" the girls then ran, being middle school students, forgetting that they would be back in school the next day to face the consequences.

Joe also fondly remembers the Middle School's Bicentennial Ceremony. All thousand plus students were given a red, white, or blue balloon with their note attached. The ceremony was to be held on the bleachers at the high school. Joe's fear was that the students would release their balloons on the walk over, just to be silly. The students walked over without incident, listened respectfully to Mr. Cocks, our principal at the time, and on cue released the balloons together. This was a beautiful sight, a beautiful day and a beautiful reminder of the potential for good that our students possess.

A line from one of my favorite books goes, "To all those who work there come moments of quiet beauty unseen by the rest of the world". I'm sure that Joe has many of those moments. And I'm sure that Joe will be missed more than we realize.

Mr. DeVenuto, thank you for being here, may God bless you, and all the best for your future.
—Jim Allen

Farewell, Mr. D!

What can we say about Mr. Joseph DeVenuto? Joe is the father of four boys. Mikey, who is married, and Jameson, Jonathan and Michael at home. Joe is a graduate of Orange County Community College. He is a “Late Bloomer” to teaching. Joe began his career as an auto mechanic for Toyota. After earning the title of Master Mechanic, he decided that tuning up engines wasn’t what he wanted. He then went to SUNY New Paltz to learn how to tune up the minds of young people. In 1982, Joe entered the halls of Valley Central Middle School.

Joe spends many hours sitting at his desk working on creative lessons. He is usually one of the first teachers to enter the building and almost always one of the last to leave. He is always willing to help a student during his lunch time or after school.

His former students say, “Mr. D. was a tough teacher, he expected nothing but the best.” However, when they look back on their middle school years, they remember how much help they received from Mr. D. Joe is highly respected by his students, even the “Chuckleheads” as he calls the difficult ones. Those who think they can disregard Mr. D’s lunch detention soon learn they are wrong when he pulls them out of the cafeteria.

Many new teachers remember Joe as



one of the first teachers to reach out and offer a friendly smile. Joe is definitely a master teacher and is always willing to assist and give advice. When Joe is not being helpful, his wife Marge is. Marge offered Mary, the new teacher on the block, a space in his classroom. He gladly extended that offer of sanctuary in his classroom where she remained for six years. Joe also served as a confidant to many. He would give his wisdom to new teachers “to use as needed.”

In his tenure at Valley Central Joe has donned many different hats. He was a building representative for the VCTA, and wrote for V.C.

Echoes. For close to a decade, Joe has been in charge of the school store. Every morning you can find Joe handing out pens, pencils and planners. Right before the holiday he is inundated with students and parents trying on various school apparel items.

Joe was also a soccer coach. He ran the school spelling bee. Deservingly, in 2009, Joe was the recipient of the Founder’s Night Award. These are just some of the examples of what Joe has done over the years for VC. He is a dedicated and caring teacher who will be missed by all. Enjoy your retirement Joe!

— *Mary Failla, Donna Marie McCarthy and all of the 8th grade corridor*

Maybrook's Donna Lloyd Retires

My dear friend, colleague, right arm, go to person, and partner in crime, lovingly referred to as Ethel, Donna Lloyd, is retiring as a third grade teacher from Maybrook Elementary after 33 years in Valley Central School District. Words cannot express how much I will miss her by my side, as will the teachers, staff, and parents at Maybrook. Donna and I taught across the hall from each other my first year in Maybrook, although we only saw each other once a month, for our bulletin board décor exchange. Years later we were partnered up to teach third grade, and it was a match made in heaven!

Donna was raised in Troy, New York. She attended and graduated in 1973 from Mount Saint Mary College where she received her B.A. degree, majoring in English and receiving a dual certificate in Elementary and Special Education. She received her M.S. in Elementary Education from SUNY New Paltz in 1977. Donna first started teaching third grade at St. Joachim's in Beacon until 1978 and then she started subbing in Valley Central. She then began working in Walden Elementary, teaching 4th and 5th grade from 1979-1982. Donna finally came to Maybrook Elementary, where she taught Special Education from 1982-1996.

Her most fortunate of teaching experiences has been from 1996 – 2011, where she has been teaching third grade. In addition to all of these experiences, Donna has also been very active on several committees including textbook committees, Effective Schools Committee, Positive Action Committee, Handwriting Committee, Principal's Council, Child Study Team, and IST. Donna has also been our Union Rep for the past 14 years.

Donna has been married to her husband Jimmy for 36 years. Together they have raised three beautiful children. Their oldest daughter Jaime, who is 33, is working toward a degree in nursing. Danielle, 29, is a dentist in Delmar, N.Y. She is engaged to be married this coming



October! Patrick, now 26, is receiving his master degree this semester from SUNY Buffalo in higher education and administration. Jimmy recently retired as a vocational instructor, so I am sure the two of them will be spending some quality time together!

In her retirement, Donna will be very busy! She has an upcoming cruise to Nova Scotia this summer as well as planning and enjoying her daughter Danielle's wedding! She will also be spending some time in South Carolina to see if perhaps she would enjoy splitting her time down there as well as up here. Donna would love to travel as well, and visiting Italy, England, and Hawaii are her top destinations... Jimmy!! Donna will continue to enjoy her line dancing, but is certainly looking forward to relaxing and enjoying time with some of her already retired friends as well as her family! As time goes on, she is interested in volunteering for special needs kids, but for now, whatever the future has in store for her, we all wish her the best of luck and happiness in all she does. She deserves it! We love you, Donna and we will all miss you...especially me!!

—Jackie Scarano

Dear Donna, You Will Be Missed!

Memories of Donna Lloyd

I have had the pleasure of working with Donna Lloyd for 23 years. When I first met her in Maybrook Elementary, she was a Special Education teacher. I always held her in my highest esteem as Donna always showed compassion and empathy for her students while providing them a safe learning environment.

Then Donna moved to Grade 3. That had her located in a classroom down the hall from me. I learned much from her. Donna has always been extremely dedicated to her profession and a great role model.

We have shared many of life's journeys, and lots of laughs. I remember the trouble she had cooking at our Camp Read a Lot night, because she arrived wearing her chef hat, and had more chocolate on her than on the s'mores. I remember little plastic men visiting in the hallway. I remember bowling with toilet paper rolls. I remember becoming a Union Rep with Donna and enjoying our dinners after the meetings. I remember cowgirl hats and boots. I remember country music and Barry Manilow. I remember her incredible humor. I remember her faithful friendship to others. I remember...

I will miss Donna as she starts on her next journey. She'll enjoy line dancing through the malls of America. She'll enjoy much deserved time with her friends. She'll enjoy time with her family. I'll enjoy her visits! Happy Trails, Donna!! I will miss your smile!

—Linda Draughn

*Donna,
Congratulations on your retirement!! I hope you enjoy every minute of retirement and find time for yourself each day!! You will truly be missed!!*

*Love,
Danielle*

*Donna,
It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with someone like you. You are a caring and warm hearted person, who was always a credit to the teaching profession. Our wish is for you to thoroughly enjoy yourself in this new stage in your life. Your absence from Maybrook will be missed every day, but we know you will be taking advantage of all that your new found freedom has to offer! Best wishes, good health, and much happiness! —Jeanne Cassel and Lorraine Mann*

Hey Sandy... (from page 6)

poem for the student to interpret. Sandy has clearly never lost the ability and the magical thinking that it takes to look at the world through a child's eyes (after all, she is married to Joe Carroll!).

Sandy, your honesty, dedication and vision have been an inspiration to all of us. You

began with glaciers and are now headed to a new beginning with sand castles. Retirement definitely looks good on you!

—Cathie Heil and Denise Pagliocca, EC

(See page 18 for more about Sandy Carroll)

Angela Colonna Will Be Missed

I was standing in Room 225 of the High School today, just after class ended and my students had left. It was the first time since learning of Angela Colonna's retirement at year's end that the opportunity presented itself to enjoy the silence of an empty classroom—the classroom Angela and I shared for more than 10 years. My mind filled with grand memories. When Angela came to Valley Central, the institutionalized mentoring of new teachers had not yet become fashionable; up until then (and still now) the best mentoring happened informally through the natural friendships formed between colleagues. I'm happy to say that Angela and I quickly formed a friendship that continues to this day. New to Valley Central, Angela did not ask questions typical of a rookie teacher—classroom management, lesson planning and pacing, organization—for she came to Valley Central with a wealth of experience as a business and computer instructor at Orange County Community College.

Angela immediately impacted Valley Central by expanding the computer courses offered at the High School, including two college computer classes sponsored through SUNY Albany. She created the Computer and Technology Club, an organization for students interested in understanding and tinkering with the latest technology. One of the Club's many accomplishments has been building and refurbishing computers, some of which were raffled as fundraisers for the Club and others that were donated to organizations such as Park Manor Nursing Home and the Montgomery Senior Center. After providing the nursing home with a computer, Angela and her students offered instruction in the use of the Internet and email, opening a new connection to the world for residents. The Computer Club also recycles hundreds of inkjet and toner cartridges, and cell phones, annually in the High School.

Angela has a tireless work ethic and her commitment to the students and staff of Valley

Central is present in many ways. Angela is an active and valuable participant in every building and district technology initiative, often attending meetings that begin hours after the High School day ends. In addition to formal initiatives, there are countless individual technology crises of the variety—"Angela, I know you're busy but my computer (LCD projector, SmartBoard, file, etc.) isn't working, what should I do?"—that Angela quietly solves on a regular basis. As well, Angela stays well beyond the close of school, almost daily, providing in-service instruction, updating the High School website, keeping abreast of the latest changes in technology to bring to her students, and so much more. Angela's generosity is endless. For example, since coming to the High School, Angela has assisted me at every Science Symposium—signing in participants, setting up and serving refreshments, and helping the clean-up crew at the end of the evening...this in addition to helping my Research students solve technology issues, edit papers, and generally just being interested in what each student is researching. I remember the time that my students were in Syracuse for a weekend science competition when Angela and her family unexpectedly showed up to encourage the students to do their best...vintage Angela Colonna.

Angela, as you leave Valley Central, know that we are better because of you—as an institution and as people. Your presence has enriched our lives and I cannot begin to imagine the impact of your absence on me and the entire VC community. Thanks for the many laughs shared, your friendship, that infectious smile, your professionalism, and your generosity with time and talents. Best wishes as you pursue life's adventures, after Valley Central, with your devoted husband Joe, and loving sons Paul and Matthew.

—Joe Fracalossi, HS

Angela Colonna Retiring From VCHS

Angela has worn many hats over the lifetime of her career. First she is a wife to Joe and a mother to Paul and Matthew.

Angela was born and raised in Brooklyn. Italian is her first language. She loves the romance languages and has been known to often times communicate with her students in Spanish, especially when she needs them to stay on task!! Dancing is her passion along with technology.

After high school, Angela decided that she wanted to be an Officer in the Navy. She embarked on the journey; however, one of her professors mentored her and encouraged her to pursue a teaching degree in the area of Business Education, telling her that she is a natural teacher. As we now know today, her professor was right. It was truly her calling. She had a few stops along the way to becoming a teacher here at Valley Central. She was a Legal Assistant; she worked for a nuclear engineering company in the World Trade Center where she was a Technology Supervisor/Manager. She was a corporate trainer. She moved to Orange County and commuted to N.Y.C. until her first son, Paul, was born.

Angela continues to be an Assistant Professor in the Business Division of O.C.C.C. While working there, she developed, wrote curricula, and implemented courses for several programs, including the “dislocated worker” program. She was one of the first teachers to teach online classes in Orange County.

She has been affiliated with OU BOCES, Washingtonville School District and SUNY Albany. She owned her own company, “Civil Service Test Training” with emphasis on Police Officer and Clerical Testing. She has been a Commissioner of Human Rights for Orange County where she continues to advocate for equality. In 2000 she was solicited to apply for the computer teacher position in the Mathematics Department. Here she helped develop cur-



riculum that engaged her students in hands-on life skills. She teaches Intro to Computer Applications, Computer Languages and Web Page Design, Virtual 3D programming and is proud of the fact that VC is one of two schools in the state that offer College Computer classes through SUNY Albany. Many of her former students keep in touch with her, through email or visiting (and some never leave—Mr. Doss).

She has also worn many hats at VC. Angela Colonna wasn't just a teacher; she was an advisor for the Computer and Technology Club, a Check and Connect Mentor, Web Master for the HS, and Professional Development Trainer for the District. She has also served on the following committees: Technology Curriculum, Technology Planning, Technology Steering, Technology Software, and HS Retirement committees. Additionally, she has been a valuable resource for the Science Research students in their work.

She is passionate about technology education, which is why she has worked diligently to improve opportunities for our students. Technology is truly a part of Angela. She knows so much but still continues to learn by taking classes. She keeps researching changes in technology in order to give her students every advantage. *(continued on page 16)*

Gayle Gridley Retires from VCHS

After 29 years of great teaching Mrs. Gayle Gridley has decided to retire. Gayle proudly represents one of the few remaining VCHS teachers who were part of the old VC family....when times were easier, teaching was truly fun and the faculty-young and old, gelled to make VCHS one of the finest high schools in the area! Gayle would serve as a role model to not only her students, but to her fellow colleagues as well.

Growing up on Long Island with 3 brothers and later moving to New Jersey, teaching originally was not in her plans. Instead, Gayle would graduate from Ryder College with a degree in accounting and business management, marry (Dick Gridley), relocate and land a local accounting position. Two children, Barbie and Rich would follow.

Gayle was putting in long demanding hours as an accountant while her husband ran the family business-Gridley's Furniture- while they juggled the two kids. One day, while helping her young daughter Barbie with her homework, Barbie exclaimed "mom why don't you teach? You are so good at it" Well, the rest is history! Off to New Paltz for a Masters in English, landing a job at Valley Central and here we are 29 years later-thanks Barbie!

Gayle has enjoyed those 29 years immensely. She would quickly gain a reputation as being dedicated, and demanding....but also fair. Fondly referred to by her grad students as "Mama G" (Gayle also served as Gradus Honorus advisor for 17 years!) former students like Marcella Wirth (present VCHS English teacher-inspired by Gayle) have wonderful memories of Gayle's depth of knowledge, humor and sarcasm! Present students agree, she is still as demanding as ever and truly believes in what she is teaching! If you have Mrs. Grid-



ley one student said.....then you are ready for college!

Gayle is so looking forward to retirement where she will focus on family-especially the 3 grandchildren, play a little golf with her husband Dick and of course sell MARY KAY!!!! (She is close to earning the infamous pink car- so place your order today!!) She will miss the interaction with students and staff alike, cherish the wonderful moments—like the time her entire classroom was moved to the main lobby, and the countless number of students that she has had an impact on. The halls of VCHS just won't be the same without "Mrs. G"

So long friend and colleague- we all wish you well in a well deserved retirement!

— *Respectfully submitted by,*

Rob Sassi-VCHS

A Tribute To Ruth Keller.....

The attribute that many of us admire most about Ruth is her fair and broad minded view of others. She always shows fair treatment of all people and displays empathy by being sensitive to the feelings, values, interests, and well-being of others. Her deep insight and compassion for diversity created a mutual understanding and respect among students and teachers.

It was a pleasure and a privilege for our small groups to have worked collaboratively on several occasions. Her competence, wisdom and enthusiasm for the love of literature overflowed and inspired the students. Her encouragement and positive attitude will be missed. She is a good friend, has been an excellent mentor, and many of us have delighted in her recipe for Pumpkin Chocolate Chip Cake!

Ruth Keller is a wonderful, caring person and a dedicated colleague. It has been a pleasure knowing her through the years. She is passionate about teaching and has taken time from her busy schedule to assist her students whenever they need help. This year we worked together during lunch duty providing the opportunity to get acquainted even better. She is very family oriented and enjoys photography and spending time with her husband, two children, and family. When asked what she will miss the most, she says it will be her friends at VC and her students.

Ruth is computer savvy, able to multi-task, can find humor in any situation, and has the ability to change people's lives as she shares the excitement of learning with students and colleagues alike. As Elizabeth Wharton said, "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle....or the mirror that reflects it." For example, as Middle School teacher, Carolyn Concolino, shares, "A very special thank you, Ruth, for teaching my nephew, Andrew, how to compensate for his visual disability. He had difficulty with ELA due to his disability. Being placed in your reading lab was the best



thing that could have happened to him. That year he aced his ELA state exam and the following year his teachers wanted to place him in advanced classes. Thank you for making the connection with him."

If you've ever conversed with her for any amount of time, you will quickly be impressed with Ruth Keller's broad-based scope of knowledge about many topics. This is likely rooted in her avid reading of both academic and current literature. She and her husband take frequent day trips, often visiting sites that she can later incorporate into her lessons with students.

Ruth Keller has many admirable qualities. One is certainly her patience. A teaching position many of us would consider challenging, she was employed many years at McQuade School, where she developed a set of particular skills which enabled her to effectively work with difficult students. *(continued on page 19)*

Linda Kirkpatrick: “What are We Going to Do Without Her?”

Linda Kirkpatrick, longtime teacher extraordinaire, will be retiring this June after twenty-six years with the Valley Central School District. Her colleagues at Walden Elementary School will sorely miss her. Linda is viewed as a multi-faceted gem among her co-workers. In addition to her quick wit and dry sense of humor, she possesses boundless energy and leadership qualities beyond compare.

Linda's unbridled passion when it comes to educating her students is inspiring. As an avid reader and writer herself, Linda authentically imparts her love of literacy and learning to her students on a daily basis. She respects the individuality of students and implicitly knows how to nurture their self-esteem and confidence in order to create highly motivated and successful learners. In particular, she ensures that students have the strategies, skills, and tools they will need to be successful throughout their school careers.

Unearthing a little history on our friend Linda, led us to discover (hmm...this is starting to sound like an excavation!) that prior to becoming a reading teacher, she dabbled in some diverse fields. Linda attended Pratt Institute for Architecture, and took a leave of absence at one point to work with her husband in the real estate appraisal business. Then two children popped into the world! She later went back to school at New Paltz to get an elementary general education degree, followed by a Masters in Reading.

Linda started her auspicious career at Valley Central as a reading specialist, part-time at East Coldenham and part-time at the Middle School, in 1984. The following two years, she split her time between Walden Elementary and a gutted school bus parked on the grounds of Most Precious Blood School. At that time, the Supreme Court dictated that publicly paid teachers could not teach at private schools. (Think...era when ketchup was considered a vegetable!) Therefore, unable to “set up shop” in the building, Linda, among others, was relegated to this makeshift classroom.

Since 1988, Linda has been a full-time reading specialist at Walden Elementary School. In 1993, she was trained in Reading Recovery, a specialty she wears with distinction. If anyone has had the privilege of observing one of her RR sessions, they were, undoubtedly, thoroughly impressed with her creative style; not to mention the sense of humor she often uses to motivate her struggling readers.

Throughout her tenure at Walden, Linda has been instrumental in the creation and/or coordination of various literacy programs that encourage parent involvement. Of particular note is her implementation of P.A.R.P. (Parents As Reading Partners), which Linda has coordinated for twenty-five years. Camp-Read-A-Lot for 2nd graders (eleven years) and Reading Safari for Kindergarten and 1st graders (2 years) round-out the list. For many, many years, Linda was also responsible for ordering books for the guided reading libraries, as well as providing a myriad of trainings for both teachers and parents. But that's not all! Linda has also been in charge of Walden's School Store for the past twenty years; a job she commands with great panache. Any passerby can't help but notice her unique sales technique and/or heartfelt exchanges with her 5th grade helpers. In addition, she has been an integral member of the Instructional Support Team (IST) for many years.



Linda Kirkpatrick (from page 15)

In 2009, Linda was the recipient of the prestigious Annual Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching. This was a well deserved honor for someone who always goes above and beyond.

Our dear friend, Linda, has been married to her husband, Bob, for forty-six years. Their daughter, Casey, is studying to be a Speech Language Pathologist and their son, Robert, is an author and editor. Bob and Linda's fifteen year old grandson, Cameron, a very important part of their lives, has his black belt in karate, and is an up-and-coming scholar.

Her interests include traveling (Cape Cod and Maine are perennial favorites), fundraising for



various causes, reading historical fiction and nonfiction, and finding historical places to visit (she's an American History buff). Linda is very proud of the 160 year old home she and Bob have been tirelessly rehabilitating for the last forty-four years. She's developed admirable skills in plumbing, taping, painting, and spackling. Most impressive is that she and Bob made the interior doors of their lovely home.

Every morning, Linda shakes down the coal in her coal stove, and adds two buckets of coal per day (Laura Ingalls Wilder, one of her favorite book characters, would be proud!). She even cleans the coal bin whenever the opportunity arises! Linda considers herself a farm girl and has fond memories of the two years (2nd grade to 4th grade) when she lived with her grandparents on a farm.

Future plans include: sleep, cleaning the house, exploring New York State and the New England area. We wish Linda all the best in her future endeavors and look forward to seeing her often at school functions and parent involvement nights.

—Respectfully submitted by Suzanne Eastwood, Eileen Panagiotopoulos, Bonnie Rum and Jessica Tsantes

Angela Colonna (from page 12)

She considers herself a technology guru that would love to have a microchip planted in her brain so that she can absorb all the info that this world has to offer in order to enrich her students.

She totally immersed herself in the VC family and leaves Valley Central with a heavy heart knowing she has so much to give to her students. Many start as freshman and emerge as seniors with six computer college credits. She is more than a teacher to her students. After three years, there is a certain respect. She will truly miss her computer students. They would build computers, create 3D virtual world environments, and write programs. Angela will miss her students immensely and her col-

leagues who have become friends.

Angela and I started at the same time and quickly became friends. I truly enjoy our trips to South Carolina together. I really missed not seeing her every day once she moved downstairs. Angela is dedicated, conscientious, hard working, strong willed, compassionate, and dedicated to her students. Her students know her expectations, she will never accept anything less than their best; integrity is extremely important to her. Since the word "retirement" is not in her vocabulary, she hopes to teach an online class one day while sitting on the beach down South or in a foreign country holding a sweet-umbrella drink!!!! I will miss you dearly.

—Bev Risco, HS

A Farewell Tribute to Bonnie Sanchez

For those of you unfamiliar with 7th Grade Special Education teacher Bonnie Sanchez, let us tell you about her. She was born and raised in Utica, New York and is the oldest of four daughters. Her career started at Rome Developmental Center working as a Recreation Therapist providing therapeutic recreation activities to residents. She then accepted a position at the Rome Developmental Center as a Community Educator teaching disability awareness to 3rd - 12th grade students using life size puppets for two programs: "Kids on the Block" for students in the lower grades and "Mainstreet" for secondary students. Her final position at the Rome Developmental Center was as a program manager supervising facility staff and managing the services delivered to developmentally disabled children and adults in residential facilities.

In 1989 Bonnie left Utica and relocated to Amsterdam, New York. She attended SUNY Albany and earned her Masters in Special Education. Her first teaching position was as a Special Education teacher for the Amsterdam Public School District where she worked for ten years. While residing in Amsterdam she served on many school committees, community boards and sports booster clubs, including serving as President of the Centro Civico Board of Directors. Bonnie even started an organization called Families for a Safe Community to combat youth violence in the city of Amsterdam.

In 2001 Bonnie followed her husband José to the Hudson Valley where he had been commuting to work for many years. This is when she began working at Valley Central Middle School as a Special Education teacher and when we had the pleasure of starting our friendship with her. During her ten years at the middle school, Bonnie created quite a reputation for herself. For starters, her personalized license plate reads "BonBon54" and she is therefore affectionately referred to as "Bon Bon" by many of her colleagues. She is also famous

in the middle school for her fashion flair. Let's just say Bon Bon isn't afraid to wear colorful outfits. As a matter of fact, you can keep your calendar by observing the way she dresses for every holiday. It's hard to say how many times we've been out shopping and spied an item of clothing that made us exclaim, that's a "Bonnie outfit"! And don't forget the jewelry AND shoes that impeccably match all her clothing.

Bonnie takes her responsibilities as a collaborative teacher very seriously and has always been a fierce advocate for her students. She is a consummate professional in the classroom and someone who cares deeply for her fellow colleagues which has been evident from her years of service as Treasurer of the Sunshine Club. The real core of who Bonnie is as a person can be summed up in one word: Family. The adoration she displays for her husband, José, along with the pride and affection she shows for her recently married son and daughter-in-law, Vinny and Christie, along with her daughter and son-in-law, Tiffany and Michael, are unending. In fact, family is so important to her that she and José even named their boat "La Famiglia". Did we mention the dog? Freckles is the "baby" of the family and treated like royalty. Ruff!

As Bonnie and José both prepare to retire in June they are eager to begin the next chapter of their lives. They will be returning to Utica where they have already purchased land on which they will build their retirement home. They will continue to travel the world, enjoy their family and friends, and of course keep spoiling the dog! We wish them much happiness, peace, joy, relaxation, fun and excitement in their retirement. And most of all we wish Bon Bon wasn't leaving us!

Here's to you Bon Bon! Chin Don!

—Contributed by:
Tammy Coleman & Kimberly Brosius

Bonnie Sanchez

Bonnie Sanchez has taught at the Valley Central Middle School for the past ten years as a Special Education teacher. She came to the middle school with many years of teaching experience. I first met Bonnie when she joined my Special Education Department. It was apparent from the beginning of our early conversations that there were many things we had in common. Among them our love of children, but in particular our "special population." Bonnie has shown much caring, concern and dedication when working with all children. These characteristics were also evident when working alongside her colleagues. Bonnie's contributions in the field of education are ones of which she can be proud.

Those of you who know Bonnie also know she enjoys interacting out of the educational setting with her colleagues, friends and family.

So to you Bonnie, I say thank you for being part of the Valley Central Middle School, the Special Education Department and all that you have accomplished in your teaching career. But

especially in your retirement, I wish you much luck and happiness.
—Annie Steele



Thank You, Sandy Carroll!

Sandy Carroll, the recipient of the 2010 SUNY New Paltz Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching, is retiring. Sandy is an awesome teacher and supportive colleague who has been a mentor for new teachers, playing an active role in the Viking Induction and Mentoring Programs and more recently taking on the responsibilities of mentoring year 2 and 3 teachers. She has been an inspiration to many teachers throughout her career.

Sandy has been a building representative for many years, coordinating VOTE-COPE and other fundraising activities.

Throughout her career Sandy has used her love for children and the art of teaching to

inspire her students and nurture success. Sandy would not and does not "settle"; for Sandy, doing your best and reaching beyond your ability is the only acceptable norm.

When it comes to the profession of teaching and what is appropriate and acceptable for children, Sandy has used her voice to fight for what she believes is right. Sandy has not stood quietly on the sidelines, she has had the courage to speak and her voice has always been heard and respected. Thank you Sandy for being an advocate for our profession and our children.

—Rich Steger, EC, VCTA Vice Pres.

Colleen Sirna to Retire

Colleen Sirna has been a colleague and friend for many years. She earned her BA and MA in Art Education from New Paltz. Seeking a change of scenery, she moved to West Virginia for a year before returning to her hometown of Wallkill, NY. She began teaching art at Valley Central Middle School in December of 1985. This past year she began teaching in the elementary schools. Colleen is a long term resident of Pine Bush where she lives with her husband, Robert. Her son, Dan, is now in the military, stationed at Fort Lewis in Washington State.

Many people appreciate her efforts to help others in projects all over the school. This is especially true of the Beautification and Development Team. Many times we'd have "oops" moments in projects and she was there to fix them. She helped us particularly with the cards we produced and sold as a fundraiser and also with the seventh grade boys' bathroom mural.

Colleen's enthusiasm for art and art education is contagious. She never stopped coming up with creative ideas for her students. She also helped decorate the cafeteria with the colorful mosaic murals that were used in her lessons on color. In addition, she was passionate

about exhibiting students' artwork and helped organize several shows. Colleen is also a strong proponent of interdisciplinary education and collaborated with Home & Career Skills classes on an architecture unit and in a sewing project involving windsocks.



Outside of school, Kathryn's son, Kevin, received private art instruction that helped him develop confidence and skill. Colleen pitches in on church projects and caring for her father, as well as helping with her nieces and nephews. For fun, Colleen enjoys gardening, hiking, cooking, reading, swimming, and snorkeling. She is planning to volunteer at Castle Point and with Meals on Wheels.

After Colleen retires, she is looking forward to spending more time on a new business venture, as well as traveling. She and her husband recently went to Oklahoma, Washington State, and the Florida Keys. In the future, Colleen and Robert are planning a vacation in Italy. Enjoy your retirement, Colleen!

—*Donna Marie McCarthy & Kathryn Phillips*

Ruth Keller (continued from page 14)

This is perhaps one of the reasons she exhibits such amazing patience and creativity in her teaching approach, enabling her to accommodate the learning modalities of every sort of student she has taught. For one keen example, she worked extensively with an 8th Grade Muslim student to guide and assist her in creating a project of particular interest which enabled her to meet her Social Studies project responsibilities. Without this individualized help, this student would never have even done the project. In another specific example, Mrs. Keller shared

her own personal background family genealogy and immigration experiences to assist that student in setting up and completing their Immigration Project.

"Shalom" and "Mazel Tov" our friend -- you will truly be missed. Enjoy your retirement years!

—*Liz Henriquez, Carmen Maher, and Heather Martin*

Mac's Musings (from the Retiree Side)...

That time of year is upon us once again— to school people (and that's what we are) the end of the school year is our time of change. Active teachers are overwhelmed with papers and tests and reports and other “stuff.” A hectic time.

Retired teachers are reflecting on how it was during their time: updating student registers, checking with report card buddy, exit interviews (I must be really old).

The special teachers at this time of year are the soon-to-be-retirees of '11, wondering about the time to come, a time of great change. It is this group that has made me reflective (or even more reflective than usual). Eleven teachers will retire—more than 300 combined years of teaching. That is a lot of math and grammar and history and technology(!), etc., etc., etc.

This group of new retirees can be justly proud of this transfer of knowledge, this invitation to learning...

But the most important reflection for these new retirees should be the difference they have made in the lives of their students by their example in being civil, in showing kindness, in expecting and bestowing respect, in giving all kids the chance to excel, in nurturing young men and women to become men and women for others.

You have made a marvelous journey. May your retirement years be joy-filled. Ad multos annos.

—Mac, AKA Kevin McFadden,
Retiree Representative

Thank You to Our Retirees Who Have Served in Leadership Positions in the VCTA! You Will be Missed!

