

Bob Owen: "He made me think and take another look."

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 that would encourage them to love learning. He has accomplished those goals by some unconventional means.
 Fellow teacher Shelley Ferguson says it was not unusual to come into Mr. Owen's classroom and discover "25 children all engaged in different things."
 "He always believed in kids learning the way they wanted to learn, but it is a big challenge to

run a class that way," she says.
 Ms. Ferguson calls her own teaching methods, "much more structured," but she admires the way Mr. Owen has been able to be a one-on-one learning catalyst to so many children, in so many grades, for so many years.
 "He made me think and take another look at the way I do things," she observes.
 In fact, Mr. Owen ("Owie" to the kids) has taught at least one

subject to every grade level between Junior Kindergarten and Grade 8 during his 30-year teaching career. But he acknowledges that Grade 5 was his favourite niche.
 "Most teachers have an age they particularly enjoy," he says. "In Grade 5, the kids are old enough (10-11 years old) to be independent, but not so old that they disassociate from the teacher. You can reason with them, and there are all sorts of ways you can connect with them and motivate them to learn."



Bob Owen talks with Osprey Media President and CEO Michael Sifton at the official opening of the new Northumberland Publishers office, Cobourg, July 10.
 PHOTO BY TED AMSDEN

After his first two years teaching at a four-room school in Courtice, Mr. Owen spent five years at Percy Centennial in Warkworth. But for most of his career, the past 23 years, he has been at Grafton Public School.
 He always saw his position as teacher as an extension of his own school days, being "the class clown." His teaching style reflected more of that fun-loving spirit, rather than the "sage on the

stage" approach.
 "He's so light-hearted; he takes everything so easy," marvels Mrs. Ferguson, a Grade 8 teacher. "There's so much to worry about in teaching these days, but nobody ever saw Bob Owen worked up."
 She recalls that, whenever she was feeling worried or blue about the job - or about life in general - Mr. Owen could be counted on for a cheering remark.
 "Think of sunshine," he'd say.
 He kept his colleagues centered, she says, by advising them, "Remember why you became a teacher."

room," he smiles.
 Maybe this attachment had something to do with his off-beat (Lesley says "zany") style. He always taught in his sock feet, for instance, because he was comfortable that way.

And, he has been known to enter his classroom through the window, if he was late and didn't want to pass by the principal's office. Small wonder his students regarded him as one of them.

As he played a recording of "Simply the Best" over the school's PA system on his final day, Bob Owen says he had tried to prepare himself for the wrench of leaving the classroom, the children; but he had not realized how tough it would be to leave some of his colleagues.

Mrs. Ferguson feels she is losing a vital touchstone: "Now I will have to look somewhere else for someone to keep me on track."

She notes the children were "deeply saddened" one of their favourite teachers will not be back on staff in the fall.

"Some of the kids were crying. He'd invested a lot of time in them. Bob didn't just teach the curriculum. He was a real father figure who taught those kids so much about life," she explains, a catch in her voice.

Golf will be one pursuit for Mr. Owen's retirement years. He can devote more time to the 150-year-old house in Cramahe Township he shares with his wife. And the couple can plan more trips to visit their daughter, Dr. Sarah Owen-Vandersluis, who lives and works in England. Of course, he will continue to work for the *Colborne Chronicle*.

Mr. Owen will also be back in schools doing some supply teaching. So, kids, don't lock those windows. You never know when "Owie" will pop in, slip off his shoes, and spread some sunshine.

Colborne library hosts summer reading and activity program for kids

The Cramahe Township Public Library, Colborne Branch, is offering a summer program for children between Junior Kindergarten and Grade 6 ages.
 Marie Prins and Arden Hagedorn are busy planning a summer of crafts, stories and other activities to go along with the TD Summer Reading Club. This year, the summer reading club theme is "20,000 reads under the sea."
 The programs began Tuesday, July 15, and run until Thursday, August 21.
 On Tuesdays, the programs run from 2 to 3:30 p.m. for children in Junior Kindergarten through Grade 2. The organizers ask a parent or teenager to accompany the younger children.
 On Thursdays, programs will run for Grades 3 to 6 from 2 to 3:30 p.m.
 Children can come into the Colborne library on King Street West to register for the Summer Reading Program and obtain their poster, stickers and activity book (the amount of these items is limited!).
 Anyone with questions about the program can call the Colborne Branch of the Cramahe Township Library at 905 355 3722.

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Bob Owen takes a bow from teaching

BY EILEEN ARGYRAIS
 SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

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It speaks volumes that, when Bob Owen took that final "bike ride into the sunset" on his last day of teaching at Grafton Public School, he was actually headed east. Mr. Owen has spent much of his teaching career pursuing a different direction than most.
 Well known to *Colborne Chronicle* readers through his long-time, part-time job as a sports and news reporter, Mr. Owen has now marked the close of his full-time career as an elementary school teacher.

He says he has chosen this time to retire because his age and years of experience entitle him to do so, and because "the job isn't what it used to be."
 Because of changes to the educational system introduced by the current provincial government, he believes "teachers are no longer free to teach the subjects they love the way they want to teach them."

Happy to call himself a "non-conformist," he says he has consciously tried to instill in his students an appreciation of their own individuality, and curiosity



PHOTO BY TED AMSDEN

After 30 years, Cramahe Township's Bob Owen has retired from fulltime teaching responsibilities at the elementary school level. But he has plans to continue with his other interests.

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