



COMMUNITY

Teacher of the Month

Mr. VandenNoort patient, caring, funny

By Stephanie Hounsell
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Bert VandenNoort didn't intend to become a teacher. In fact, he happened upon the profession in a rather roundabout way.

He actually dabbled in several careers before he realized teaching was what fulfilled him most. And now there's no turning back.

"Being with the kids when I'm in the classroom, I enjoy every last moment," he said, adding, "It's a real calling; it's a lifestyle. You have to dedicate yourself to it to succeed."

VandenNoort, who teaches Grade 6 at W.I. Dick Middle School, has been selected the Teacher of the Month for December after being nominated by 11-year-old Spencer Chilwell, one of his students.

Spencer cited VandenNoort's patience, caring attitude and humour as a few of the reasons he should be chosen.

"I think he is my favourite teacher I have ever had," Spencer wrote in an e-mail to the *Champion*.

It's ironic that when VandenNoort was a high school student and took a quiz to help determine which career he was suited to, he refused to even consider teaching when it appeared at the top of the list.

"No way!" was his reaction, VandenNoort remembers. "I didn't see myself standing at the front of the class."

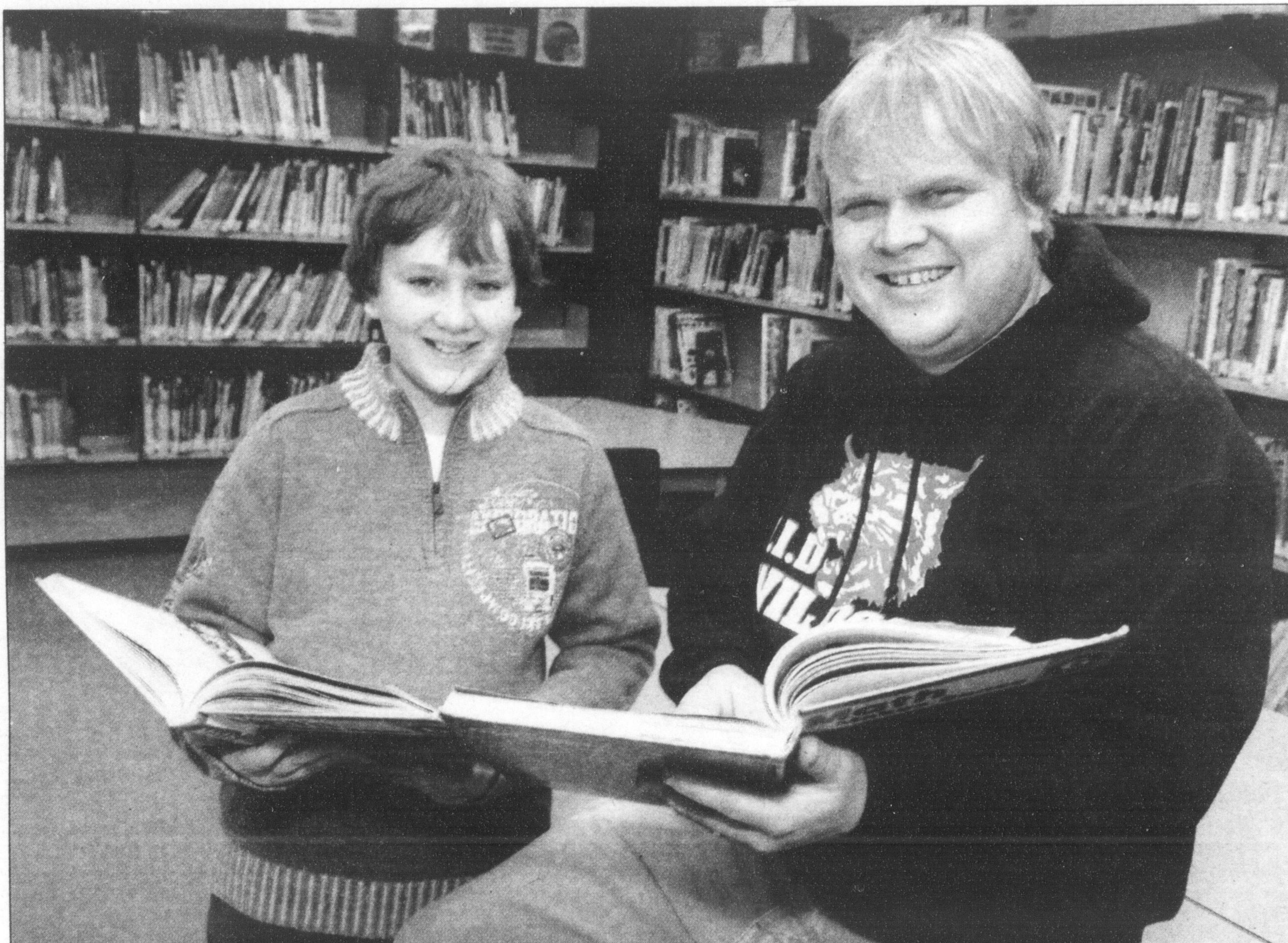
He earned a diploma in environmental protection and then graduated from university with a history degree.

It was while working at a camp teaching environmental science for a few summers that VandenNoort realized he enjoyed standing in front of a group of kids and helping them learn. So on he went to Teachers' College.

"I was meant to be here," he said.

This is VandenNoort's second year at W.I. Dick and his fourth year teaching. As well as Grade 6, he also teaches Grade 7 English.

Students in Grades 6 and 7 are fun to work with because they're at a point where they can have in-depth conversations about



GRADE A TEACHER: W.I. Dick Grade 6 instructor Bert VandenNoort looks over some math texts with Spencer Chilwell, who nominated him for Teacher of the Month.

world issues, VandenNoort said.

Remembering what he was like in Grade 6 helps him better understand his students, he said, admitting: "I had a tendency to be difficult."

VandenNoort said it's important that he be accessible to his students if they need extra help. In Spencer's case, that extra help made all the difference.

Spencer's mom, Andrea Thomson, said

her son's teacher contacted her right away when he realized Spencer was struggling with math. VandenNoort began working with him at lunchtime, giving him the one-on-one help Spencer needed.

Now, Spencer's grades have improved, Thomson said.

VandenNoort said his students aren't the only ones learning; he's continually seeking ways to improve how he does his job.

"There's no blanket way to teach," he said. "Teaching is an art form that's constantly being re-done. The way I taught last year isn't even close to the way I teach this year."

When asked what he likes best about his teacher, Spencer said: "He cares about his students."

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