

COMMUNITY

Teacher of the Month

French Immersion teacher goes the extra mile

By Stephanie Hounsell
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Lise Belanger didn't want to live with regrets. So, 15 years ago, she decided to follow the lead of her two university-attending children in order to become a teacher — proving it's never too late to fulfill a dream.

"It's something I always wished I had done and never got around to," she said, adding with a laugh, "There were three of us at university."

Having never been to university before, it was a bold move, but Belanger was up for the challenge.

For the past 10 years, she has been a French Immersion teacher at W.I. Dick Middle School, reaping the rewards of her determination and hard work.

And for June, she has been selected the *Champion's Teacher of the Month* thanks to a glowing nomination letter from Grade 7 student Kathleen Foley, 13.

In her letter, Kathleen made it clear she's not the only student who thinks Belanger goes the extra mile. "My entire class really respects Mme (mademoiselle) Belanger... We can tell that she respects us, and enjoys what she does. Not just because it's her job but because she likes being with us."

She's always giving of her time, Kathleen said, particularly with the yearly school play she co-directs and the fundraisers she organizes for the humanitarian organization Free the Children.

And her students enjoy the way Belanger is creative in her teaching methods, Kathleen said.

"She makes an effort to make our activities entertaining," she wrote.

Belanger was born and raised in Montreal and then lived in Paris — as well as Dubai and San Francisco — for a couple of years, so it seemed natural that she become a French Immersion teacher.

Belanger teaches her students history, geography, math and language arts in French.

Some of her students have an additional language spoken at home, making them tri-lingual.

"It's such an asset for them," she said.

Her first career was in banking, but Belanger said she always liked working with kids, so her switch made sense.

When she's not in the classroom, Belanger can often be found working with students in any number of ways.

She's able to exercise her passion for drama through the school plays, which are time-consuming but rewarding, Belanger said.

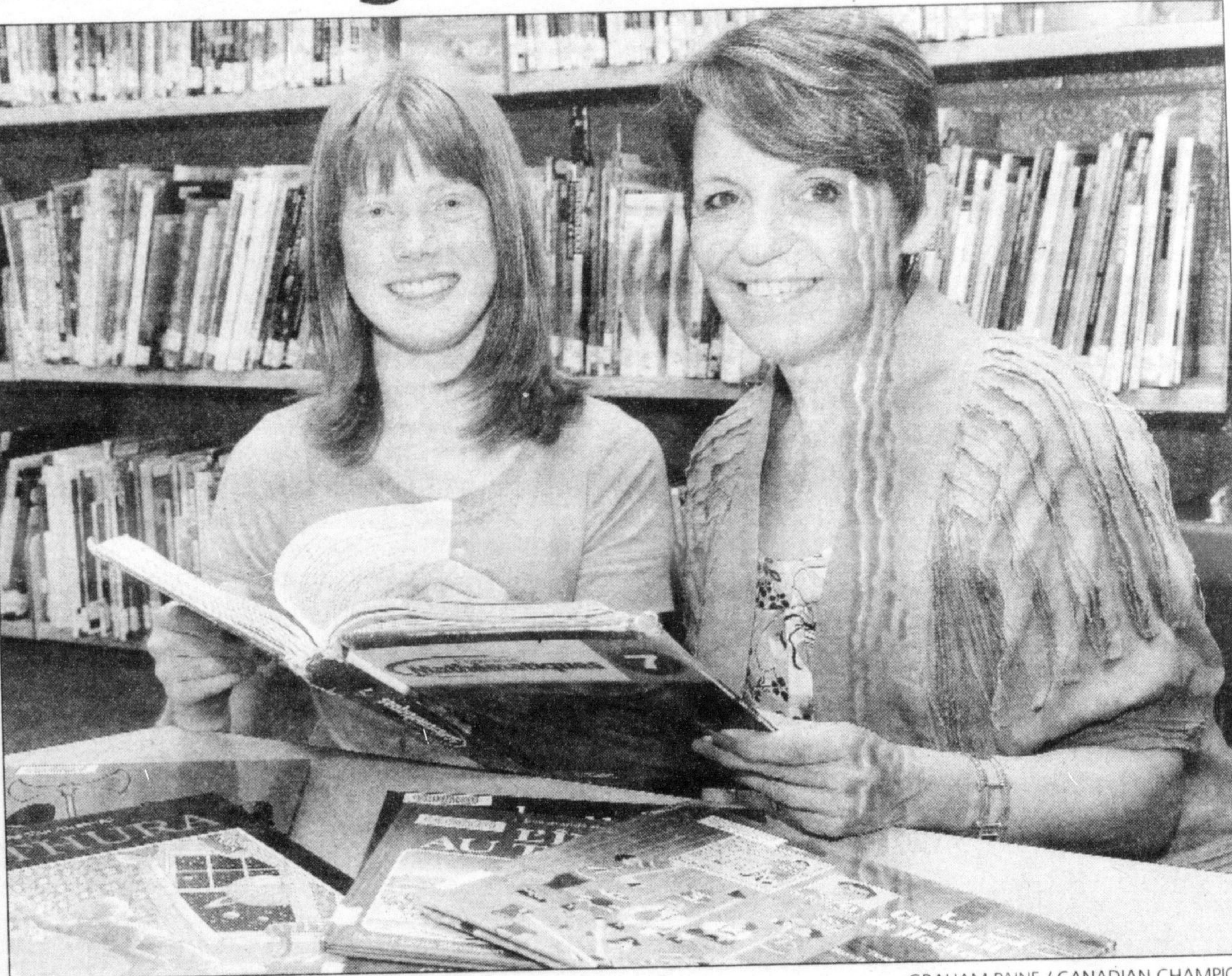
"It's almost like another career. It's like working two jobs. But I love drama and we have so much talent here at the school."

She added the students put in just as many hours as she does, and their commitment and enthusiasm is admirable.

This year's performance was Willy Wonka, and it went off without a hitch.

Too often, it's only the trouble-making students the world sees, Belanger said. But she sees the other side on a daily basis.

"Every kid has good in them and once they understand you're on



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GRADE A TEACHER: W.I. Dick Middle School French Immersion teacher Lise Belanger looks through a math text with Teacher of the Month nominator Kathleen Foley.

their side, it's pretty smooth sailing. It's mutual respect," she said.

Teaching her students not just academics but also how to become responsible, caring citizens is important, Belanger said, and she hopes to lead by example.

"Those are probably the things they'll remember me for," she said.

Every first break, without fail, Belanger can be found selling ice

cream treats to students to raise money for Free the Children, an organization that mobilizes kids to help other kids around the world.

So far this school year, from ice cream sales alone, the school has raised \$1,600. It's enough to pay three teachers' salaries for one year in Africa.

Belanger said she originally intended to sell the ice cream only

in the warmer weather, but the students protested.

"(They said) 'Oh no, we'll eat ice cream all year 'round!'"

Teaching is an extremely rewarding profession she said, adding, "I'm looking forward to many more years."

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