

ECONOMIST & SUN/TRIBUNE

AT THE SCHOOLS

TEACHER OF THE MONTH

Markham High has famous graduates

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

MARKHAM DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL
89 CHURCH STREET,
MARKHAM, ONT.,
L3P 2M3.
PHONE: 905-294-1886
FAX: 905-294-8141
EMAIL:
MARKHAM.DHS@YRDSB.EDU.ON.CA
PRINCIPAL: NANCY BAHNIUK
VICE-PRINCIPALS: JOHN TSOUROUNIS
GINNY STANKIEWICZ
KEN SHIGEISHI
SCHOOL COUNCIL CHAIR: SUSAN
WADSWORTH

Markham District High School is a neighbourhood school close to where its students live.

That sense of belonging might be one reason so many of the students are involved in the school's music programs, sports teams, clubs and other activities.

Most of the students can walk to the school; just a small number come by bus.

Graduates include York Region public school board chairperson Bill Crothers, the late Markham lawyer Paul Mingay, Deputy Mayor Frank Scarpitti, NHL hockey players Steve Thomas and Brad May and Olympic silver-medalist Debbie Wilkes, now a figure skating commentator.

"Markham (high school) is unique," noted vice-principal John Tsourounis. "The kids are very, very involved in the school life. They are receiving a well-rounded program."

"The music program has attracted a lot of kids to music," noted Mr. Tsourounis. "It has built quite a reputation."

In addition to the five full-time teachers running under the direction of department head Bill Thomas, a group of parents — the Friends of Markham Music — supports the bands with fundraisers.

More than 700 students from all grades are in music, Mr. Thomas said.

That's almost half the school population. The choice is dizzying: five concert bands, one for each grade; three jazz bands, four choirs and numerous trios and quartets.

The school holds concerts at Markham Theatre in December and May.

Awards are piling up

from the music students' talents and skills. At the Kiwanis Festival this spring, the Grade 10 band won the March class, the "A" class and the challenge class.

The Grade 12 and OAC students' Wind Symphony came first in the March class and challenge class.

The Wind Symphony was honoured recently with the Music Festivals Association of Ontario Belle-air award, acknowledging its top standing at festivals throughout the province.

These achievements can't come without practice — lots of it. "There is not a morning or an afternoon without music (at the school)," Mr. Thomas said.

The school's focus on providing a well-rounded academic education is strong.

It's one of the few schools still offering Latin and ancient Greek. MDHS is also one of the very few schools in York Region that is not semestered.

The school also offers a gifted program in Grades 9 and 10.

Students take science, history or geography, English and math in the gifted program with four other subjects as electives from the regular curriculum.



STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Grade 3 teacher Irene McNeil at St. Bernadette Catholic School in Sutton was nominated as June's teacher of the month by student Alyssa DiGuglielmo.

Teacher creates 'loving family'

BY STEFANIA RIZZI
Staff Writer

A marble jar sits on her desk. Each time a pupil in the class receives a good mark or does a good deed, he or she is allowed to put a marble in the jar and receive a treat.

There is a radio in the classroom, which students are allowed to listen and dance to during lunch hour.

When any of her students has a dance recital, figure skating competition or baseball game, she tries her best to attend.

She defines school spirit, dressing up on special occasions and helping organize public speaking competitions for junior and intermediate students.

For those and other reasons, Irene McNeil was nominated and chosen as York Region Newspaper Group's teacher of the month.

Mrs. McNeil, a Grade 3 teacher at St. Bernadette Catholic School in Sutton, has been teaching since the late 1970s. Being part of a loving family prompt-

ed the Sutton resident to become a teacher. It is that sense of belonging she wishes to pass on to her pupils through her adopt-a-grandparent program.

For a few hours each week, Mrs. McNeil and her 25 pupils visit their adopted grandparents at the River Glen Haven Nursing Home.

'Inter-generational relationships are so important. The learning that takes place between them is so impressive.'

The students and seniors spend most of the afternoon swapping stories, playing games or visiting different places of interest.

"The seniors look forward to the children coming and the children look forward to it," said Mrs. McNeil, who won a

recognition award from the town and a medal for good citizenship from the province several years ago because of her adopt-a-grandparent program.

"(The kids) try and do a lot with them because some children don't have grandparents or don't get to see their grandparents often. They get so attached to each other.

"I have a little boy who has Down's syndrome and he loves it. He goes and he hugs everyone," said Mrs. McNeil, the only teacher at the school to run the program.

"Inter-generational relationships are so important. The learning that takes place between them is so impressive."

Even though she has been teaching for more than 20 years, Mrs. McNeil said she never tires of seeing her students get excited about their education.

"I've known (I wanted to be a teacher) since I was a little girl. I don't think I would have chosen anything

See ONE, page 16.

See CHARITIES, page 12.



Fine Children's Wear

Visit our location to view our new summer collection

4981 Highway 7 E., Markham Across from Markville

905-946-9738

