

Thirteen to Retire from Prairie Central Staff

Thirteen people will retire from the service of Prairie Central Community Unit School District #8 at the close of the 2016-17 school term. Four teachers, six educational support employees and three administrator/coordinators will step down this Spring. Their distinguished careers and contributions will be honored at a reception on May 30, 2017, 9:30-10:30 AM, in the Prairie Central High School library (411 N. Seventh, Fairbury); and again at a recognition brunch immediately following in PCHS café. Family and friends are welcome to attend both events.

Teachers

Joanne Costa

Business Education (Programming) Education Teacher

Ms. Joanne Costa reminds readers that, in spite of her 33 years at Prairie Central, she really isn't that old: she "started teaching at the age of 5"! Following her graduation from Northern Illinois University with a bachelor's degree in marketing education in fall, 1981, she began her teaching career at the Bloomington Area Vocational Center. She and Joseph Costa married in 1984 and, as they made their home in the Chicago area, Dr. Costa established a successful dentistry practice and Ms. Costa taught basic programming and computer applications at Lockport High School. When Dr. Costa joined the Rural Dentistry Program, and the couple moved to Onarga, IL, Ms. Costa began her career at PCHS, teaching BASIC programming. It was on then to more sophisticated programming courses, as she developed Advanced Placement opportunities in Pascal, C++, and Java. Ms. Costa now "retires" to teach at Heartland Community College; and spend time visiting their daughter, a newly-wed residing in Pekin, and their son, a student at Stanford University, and taking mini-vacations during the teaching term.

Lesa Kline

Instrumental Music Teacher

Ms. Kline, a native of near-by Herscher, holds bachelor's and master's degree from Western Illinois University. After a brief stint as a substitute teacher and paraprofessional in the Colchester School District, she spent the next five years as band and chorus teacher for grades 5-12 in the Northwest School. She then arrived at Prairie Central and, after directing junior high and high school choruses and teaching elementary instrumental music, she became, and has remained, a teacher/director of instrumental music for high school and elementary students. She now completes 24 years at Prairie Central, having led PCHS marching bands, concert bands, jazz bands, and musical pit bands; and taught beginner and 6th grade band students. Ms. Kline plans to enjoy retirement by spending time with her son and his family, traveling, and working where opportunities arise.

Joni Studebaker

Fifth Grade Teacher

Ms. Joni Studebaker spent her formative years in Flanagan, IL, and earned her bachelor's degree from Illinois State University. Before embarking on her teaching career, Ms. Studebaker worked for 13 years as a vascular ultrasound technician for OSF-St. James Hospital (Pontiac) and BroMenn (now Advocate BroMenn) Hospital, Normal. She now concludes 22 years at Prairie Central, all but one of those years as a fifth grade teacher. Along the way she earned a master's degree from Olivette Nazarene University. She and her husband, Dale, have been married 37 years, have three children (Erin, Brooke, and Tyler), and enjoy the company of two "precious" grandsons.

Barb Zimmerman

Language Arts Teacher, Librarian

Having grown up in Fairbury, Ms. Barb Zimmerman attended Illinois State University, completing her bachelor's degree in three-and-a-half years. After teaching junior high reading and social studies in Wellington, IL, she returned to her home town and, by then, Prairie Central, where she taught library skills at Meadowbrook and Chatsworth Elementaries, and literature classes at the PCJHS. She founded the Speech Club and CARES Clowns at PCJHS, which are still going strong today. For many years, she taught literature and English, exclusively at PCJHS; and, in her final year, Ms. Zimmerman has been PCJHS's librarian. She now retires after 30 years at Prairie Central.

Educational Support Personnel

Becky Barker

Special Needs Paraprofessional

Ms. Becky Barker now completes her career as a special needs paraprofessional at Prairie Central Junior High School after 15 years. Prior to her work as a permanent para, she played a substitute para role for two years in the District. She says she has “enjoyed the responsibilities and challenges the junior high age group has offered.” Upon retirement, she plans on spending time with family, traveling, and her art work.

Fred Kilcullen

Bus Driver

Mr. Fred Kilcullen began driving a school bus in 1965, while studying to be a teacher at Eastern Illinois University. He continued to drive while teaching at Lovington, IL, after retiring from teaching and moving to Chenoa in 1998, and following the 2004 annexation of Chenoa #9 into Prairie Central. He has driven 12 years for Prairie Central, but for a total of 52 years! Mr. Kilcullen has, understandably, seen many changes in the law as it affects school bus operation – among them, driver licensure and vehicle safety. He has also noted changes in rural roads (now paved instead of gravel) and bus transmissions (now automatic instead of manual). On the sentimental side, Mr. Kilcullen appreciates having now moved into his second generation of student riders in the Chenoa area!

Linda Kinney

Special Needs Paraprofessional

Ms. Linda Kinney began as a special needs paraprofessional at Prairie Central CUSD #8 in 1998 when the “new” Prairie Central Junior High School was opened. She has worked with youngsters in a number of settings: PCHS for 11 years, Westview for one year, PCJHS for a total of two years, and PCUE for her final four years. She has lived in Chatsworth all her life. She has two sons, one to whom she donated a kidney and for whom she has been a vigilant care-giver. She reflects, “I have made a lot of friends and have many memories”.

Judy Onsager

Special Needs Paraprofessional

Ms. Judy Onsager now ends 20 years as a special needs paraprofessional for Prairie Central schools. She was raised and completed her schooling in Maquoketa, Iowa; and moved to Fairbury in 1988 due to husband, Mike’s job. After working at Dave’s Supermarket in the bakery department for ten years, Ms. Onsager became a para at the PCUE, then moved to Westview/Prairie Central Elementary School after 2011. She has been at Prairie Central during the administrations of two superintendents, and has worked under four principals and with four special needs teachers. In her two decades with PC schools, she has “made so many friends and so many memories! I have helped so many students to achieve their goals! The students also taught me how to be very patient and understanding. For that I am grateful!” She laments that she won’t be able to see friends and co-workers every day but, she says, “It has been a Fun 20 Years!” The Onsagers have two children and two grandchildren.

Vickie Thomas

Special Needs Paraprofessional

Special needs paraprofessional, Vickie Thomas, also spent some of her pre-PC years in the state of Iowa. She was a teacher’s assistant at Central Community School, DeWitt, IA. She and husband, Dave, a PC bus driver, arrived in Fairbury in 1988. After a term as secretary in a factory facility in Fairbury, Ms. Thomas spent the next 23 years as a para at Westview Elementary School, and her last four years in the same capacity at PCUE. She has the distinction of working under eight principals, and all four of Prairie Central’s superintendents! In her time at PC, Ms. Thomas is thankful to have “made many great friendships and so many memories. There is so much joy in helping children achieve their goals.” She reminds all that, of her 27 years at PC, she has drawn morning bus duty for 26 of those years! Ms. Thomas and her husband of 43 years, Dave, have two children and four grandchildren.

Carl Tull
Custodian

Mr. Carl Tull completes 11 years as a custodian at Westview Elementary and Prairie Central Upper Elementary Schools. He joined PC's custodial staff in 2005, having been recruited by then-maintenance chief Irvin "Rip" Van Winkle. Mr. Tull's work as a custodian was a second career: he retired first as an employee of Caterpillar.

Administrators & Coordinators

Dr. John Capasso
Superintendent

Dr. John Capasso will retire on June 30 after 15 years as Prairie Central's superintendent, and 36 years in public education. Dr. Capasso is, to-date, Prairie Central's longest-serving superintendent. He earned a bachelor's degree in speech communication and English at Illinois State University and began his career as an educator at Chenoa High School, where he taught English, speech, and theatre; and directed plays and musicals, coached the speech team, and sponsored several classes and clubs. Completing coursework for a master's degree in educational administration, also at Illinois State, he was the principal at Elmwood Junior-Senior High School, Elmwood, IL, and then at Minonk-Dana-Rutland Junior-Senior High School, Minonk, IL. Finishing his doctorate, his final visit to Illinois State, he assumed superintendencies at Fieldcrest CUSD #6, Minonk, IL; LeRoy CUSD #2, LeRoy, IL; and Prairie Central CUSD #8, beginning in 2002. While school chief at PC, Dr. Capasso has observed two school reorganizations, the annexation of Chenoa CUSD #9 and the recent development of "Attendance Centers"; the advent of full-day kindergarten; the considerable growth of teaching & management technology; several construction, renovation, and maintenance projects; and, as he says, "significant progress in the quality of school programs in the midst of virtually stagnant state funding". Upon retiring, Dr. Capasso plans to continue as a member of the adjunct faculty at Heartland Community College, a position he has held since 1998; continue as a participant in the American Passion Play; travel; and pursue other interests long-neglected.

Karen Hazelrigg

Principal, Chatsworth, Meadowbrook, and Primary-East Elementary Schools

Having served as principal of Chatsworth, Meadowbrook, and Primary-West, Ms. Karen Hazelrigg will retire from Prairie Central after ten years, and with 20 total years as a professional educator. A musician by training, Ms. Hazelrigg graduated from the American Conservatory of Music, Chicago, and spent nearly a decade as a professional percussionist with various bands and orchestras. She turned to teaching music in private and public schools; then to administration as assistant principal at Booth Central, Wilmington, IL, as principal and transportation director for Bradley Elementary District #61, Bradley, IL, and as principal for Prairie Central. With her duties as building administrator, Ms. Hazelrigg also served as K-4 District curriculum coordinator, secretary of the District curriculum council, music department liaison, RtI coordinator, and in many other ad hoc and long-term leadership capacities.

Phil Tetley

District Technology Coordinator

Mr. Tetley retired as District technology coordinator officially in 2006, but has continued to serve PC as coordinator in his status of retiree and volunteer. He re-retires after 49 years, 48 of them in the employ of Prairie Central or one of its predecessor schools. Mr. Tetley grew up in the Forrest and Fairbury areas, and graduated from Fairbury-Cropsey High School. After earning a bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois, he began a long and venerable career as a math teacher at Glenwood School for Boys, Glenwood IL. He then returned to the area to teach mathematics at Chatsworth and Fairbury-Cropsey High Schools, and then mathematics and computer programming courses at Fairbury-Cropsey and Prairie Central High Schools. Along the way, he earned a master's degree and continued to pursue post-graduate studies at Illinois State. For the past three decades, either in conjunction with his teaching, or exclusively, Mr. Tetley has served the District as technology coordinator, overseeing the placement of 2,400 student and staff computers, from desktops to iPad Minis; the advent of Smart technology; the introduction of the internet, with CIRBN as its most recent incarnation; the development of the network and upgrades to its infrastructure; as well as developments in

telecommunications and security. Mr. Tetley has, in a sense, created the role of technology coordinator at Prairie Central.