

By Tawny Burmood

UNL Student Intern

When the doors open at 8 a.m. Monday morning, several things will be familiar to students who have had a three-month break. However, new classes and a few new teachers will also provide an aura of unfamiliarity throughout.

New faculty include:

Nicole Putnam

At the start of the 2010-2011 school year Perkins County High School will be welcoming a new English teacher, Nicole Putnam.

Putnam graduated in 2007 from the University of Nebraska-Kearney with a bachelors degree in science and education and an emphasis in speech.

Later she attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she received her English 7-12 endorsement and her ESL (English as a second language) endorsement in K-12.

Currently she is working on her masters degree at UNL. With only three classes left, she plans to receive her degree in 2012.

While in Lincoln she worked as a substitute teacher at Lincoln High for a semester. There she taught three sections of English 10, American literature and a section of advanced placement

12. However, this will be her first full-time position.

“I’m really nervous and excited at the same time,” Putnam said. “I think that’s pretty normal for any new teacher.”

The job opportunity ran across her when she attended a UNL teacher job fair. She didn’t know much about Grant she said, but after talking with the PCHS Superintendent, Tobin Buchanan, it felt like a good fit.

Putnam grew up in St. Libory just right outside of Grand Island and graduated in 2003 from Northwest High School. Three years ago she married Ryan Putnam. Ryan is working as the assistant maintenance supervisor at the Perkins County Health Services. The couple has a two-year-old daughter named Cecilia.

The Putnam family made the move to Grant in late June. Being outdoors and getting involved in the community is what she feels she’ll love the most about Grant.

“I really enjoy that I can walk anywhere I need to be,” Putnam said. “The people I’ve met so far are nice and interested in getting to know us.”

As school draws near she is looking forward to getting to know the students. She is especially excited to have smaller classes than she had at Lincoln High, where at times would have 31 students.

“I think I’ll be able to be a better teacher, because I’ll be able to get to know them personally,” Putnam said.

It’s an education that she personally experienced attending one of the smaller schools in Grand Island.

“I was comfortable there, I felt at ease,” Putnam said. And that’s exactly the reason she got into teaching—to be able to form connections with students.

The most rewarding part of teaching she said is, “the feeling you get when the student understands what you’ve been trying to teach and when you know that light bulb has gone off.”

“I love that connection that you can form with people,” Putnam said. “It’s not like any other connection you can make in life.”

Not only does she want to make a connection with her students, but she said she hopes to start getting involved in the community. And although she’s just starting her career, Putnam said she’s here for the long haul.

“I’m hoping I’ll be a good fit in the district,” Putnam said. “I’ll be here as long as they need me.”

Brooke Richardson

Brooke Richardson will become the new high school math teacher this year teaching Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Trigonometry, Analysis and Calculus.

She grew up in North Platte where she graduated from North Platte High School in 2000.

Later she attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she received her BS in elementary education in 2004. Richardson received her 7-12 math endorsement and her MA in education with a math emphasis at Chadron State College.

“I come from a family that values education and has supported me through all my schooling,” Richardson said. “I enjoy working with students and making an impact in their learning.”

Previously, she has worked for Sutherland Public School where she taught mathematics for five years. Now she has made the move to Grant to pursue a high school math position.

“Perkins County has great faculty and students supported by involved community members who value education,” Richardson said.

Richardson is excited to get the school year started. The task of a math teacher is always a challenging one, but one that can be very rewarding when students start to appreciate math and how it is used in various aspects of the real world.

“Teaching math can be a challenge because so many students are disinterested in its complexity,” Richardson said. “Although challenging, I enjoy helping students achieve a better understanding of math.”

Amanda Wood

Perkins County Middle School will be welcoming Amanda Wood, who will be teaching Language Arts for sixth and seventh grades during the new 2010-11 school year.

Wood was born in Colorado and later moved to Alaska where she lived for four years. She spent most of her middle and high school years in Red Cloud, Neb.

After graduation she attended Mid-Plains Community College and Chadron State College where she majored in Elementary Education K-8.

Over three years ago she moved to Grant after her husband, Brandon, was transferred with Great Plains Communications where he now works as a broadband technician. Together the couple has three children, Bailey, 11, Beau, nine, and Brient, five.

Perkins County Middle School will be her first teaching job, but has had previous experience with children working at Woody's Treehouse Childcare.

"I am excited about being given this opportunity to do what I love," Wood said.

Her goal for this school year is to help each student grow.

"I want to help students develop a love for literature and its different genres, utilize the 6+1 Trait Writing program as well as teach the students to embrace their individuality and to respect the individuality of others," Wood said.

While teaching Language Arts she will also become the new assistant volleyball coach.

"I am excited to work with the girls," Wood said. "I want to be a positive role model for them."

Carrie Wykert

Former Grant resident and Grant High School alumna, Carrie Wykert, has returned to her old stomping ground.

Come Aug. 16, she will become the new second grade teacher at Perkins County Schools taking over for Mary Kent, who taught for 34 years and retired at the end of the 2009-2010 school term.

For Wykert the experience is an exciting one and may be a bit strange when she goes to attend her first faculty meeting, she said.

Some who used to be her high school teachers will now become her colleagues. Although she will no longer be the student at PCHS, she said one thing won't change when it comes to seeing her old teachers.

"I'm sure I'll still call them by Mr. and Mrs.," Wykert said.

After Wykert graduated high school she attended Doane College where she earned a bachelors degree in elementary education and special education in 1996.

For 13 years she worked at Rousseau Elementary in Lincoln teaching special education. Later she moved back to the western side of the state where she taught at Ogallala Public Schools for 12 years. While there she taught fourth grade and second grade.

Wykert celebrated her 14th wedding anniversary this summer with her husband Kolby, who also grew up and graduated from Grant. Kolby is a rancher and farmer, working in the Madrid area. Together they have three children, Kyla, who will be starting fourth grade, Kaden, who will be a second grader, and Kable, who will be in first grade.

Wykert and her family are the fourth and fifth generations to live in Grant. Moving back was largely in part to be with their families.

"My husband and I always looked back," Wykert said. "We always knew we were going to come back to raise our family. It's the area we love to live in."

The most exciting thing, she said, is being able to teach in the town she went to school in.

“It’s extremely exciting for me to teach where I got a great education and where I got a great start to my teaching career,” Wykert said. “I’ve always had great pride for Perkins County Schools.”

Teaching has always been instilled in her growing up. In fact she came from a family of teachers. Wykert’s mother, Mrs. Johnson, who is a kindergarten teacher, will be teaching right across the hall from her. But her grandparents and many of her aunts and uncles were and still are teachers.

Each year, Wykert said, brings a new experience.

“It’ just always exciting getting a new group every year,” Wykert said. “Nothing is ever the same.”

But being back in the community that she calls home makes the experience much different.

“This is just the icing on the cake to be teaching for Perkins County Schools and to be back in this community.”

Jim Hendrickson

Jim “Stumpy” Hendrickson will become the new special ed para at the high school. He will also continue working as a substitute bus driver and the activities bus driver this year.

As a full-time special ed para he will be assisting with the special ed students in the classroom working one-on-one with the students under teacher supervision.

Hendrickson is no stranger to the community. He has worked previously as a para substitute at the Perkins County High School and Ogallala High School as well as an activities bus driver for both schools.

“I’ve always worked well with kids and had patience and respect for them,” Hendrickson said. “I have lots of confidence in our young people.”

He started working with kids when he coached gymnastics and swimming and diving while in college in Auburn, Calif. Afterward he joined the U.S. National Guard and retired after 23 years of service.

Before working for the school system he worked in the restaurant business doing food service management for 30 years. He owned and ran a business here in Grant named “Stumpy’s,” which is now where Bench Warmers is located.

He recently spent two years in Alaska working in food service management at the Alaskan Native boarding school. While there, he coached the cross country team. This summer he worked at AgLand Aviation.

Hendrickson describes himself as a people person. And although he has worked in various fields and places he is excited to be working in the school system.

“It’s something I should have done right out of college,” he said.

Michelle Buchanan

Michelle Buchanan will become the new Perkins County Middle School assistant volleyball coach this fall.

Buchanan was raised in Elkhorn and later attended the University of Northern Colorado to become a teacher. After receiving her teacher degree she taught seventh and eighth grade mathematics for eight years.

She has coached a total of seven years at various schools including Elkhorn and Ralston.

Her husband, Tobin, is the superintendent at Perkins County Schools. They have been married for eight years.

Together they have three children, William, six, will be entering first grade this year and Beau, four, and Ben, three.

In her free time she teaches step aerobics once a week at the Image Total Fitness Center. She also enjoys running, playing golf and watching college football.

With the new school year approaching she said she is most excited about making a difference in each girl's life.

"I love trying to build confidence in young girls by showing them they can go farther than they thought and to help teach them to believe they can accomplish anything they dream," Buchanan said.

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