



Welcome To NH-V Online

*Welcome to NH-V Online,
a publication designed to better acquaint
the community with the people who deliver
the quality education to North Hunterdon-Voorhees
Regional High School District students.*

*Quality education begins with quality teaching,
administrative leadership and support staff commitment.*

*In these pages you will meet these people,
learn about their commitment to students
and gain a greater understanding
of why NH-V is a recognized leader in quality education.*



John Hahola

Assistant Principal of Instruction, NHHS

“I am just an old Hunterdon County farm boy.”

That’s partially true. North Assistant Principal of Instruction John Hahola was born and raised on a local dairy farm, and is part of five continuous generations that have resided and worked on the Pittstown farm.

Graduating Rutgers University with a degree in Agriculture, Mr. Hahola worked in middle management for a Fortune 500 company, did a hitch in the Air Force, obtained a Master’s in Science and Soil Chemistry, and worked the

family farm. But then, with a corporate transfer on the horizon, he realized he had a decision to make.

“I simply did not want to leave the community,” he said. “The farm, in fact the entire county, was a vital part of my life.”

Leaving the corporate sector, he began substitute teaching as part of his examination of potential new careers. He was hooked.

“I enjoyed it far more than I might have dreamed I would,” he said. “I seemed to have a knack for it.”

In 1993, having successfully pursued alternate route certification, Mr. Hahola joined the North staff as a teacher of chemistry. His no nonsense approach to getting things done, complimented by an open, easy rapport with students, allowed him to quickly ascend the educational ladder. In 2000 he became head of the Science Department, and a year later, after completing a second Master’s at TCNJ in Educational Leadership, he was appointed Assistant Principal.

Mr. Hahola feels his military and corporate background offer a unique blend of experiences that create an excellent “knack for management.” That quality, combined with common sense and a good work ethic, are the strengths he brings to his office.

“I do miss the daily contact with the students,” said the former teacher and coach. “But I maintain my influence on their lives by my ability to impact the overall educational

< *John Hahola*

program. I especially value my 12 years as chair or administrator in charge of the Student Outreach Services Team.”

Not a bad record for a “Hunterdon County farm boy.” ●



Al Stumpf

Athletic Director, VHS

Al Stumpf, Athletic Director at VHS, has always seen coaching as an extension of teaching.

“You have to plan, make instant decisions, deal with different levels of abilities and advocate constantly for young people,” he said. “A teacher also does all these things.”

As Athletic Director, Mr. Stumpf must also deal with the many pitfalls of coordination and scheduling for events in a school where over 1,000 students are engaged in some form of athletics.

Graduating Trenton State (today’s TCNJ) with a degree in History and Education, he also holds a Master’s in Education, also from TCNJ. Having done his student teaching at North, he came to Voorhees, where he’s now been for the better part of 29 years.

During his years at VHS, he developed a close relationship with former Athletic Director Sal Patti. Through that relationship he got a good deal of “unofficial on the job training” for the post he ultimately took over.

Mr. Stumpf has been involved in sports “since I was seven years old.” But he has also been involved in teaching, and he is and will always remain a teacher first.

“My attitude toward my job always brings me back to my teaching,” he said. “We have a high achieving student body here, and in that environment it’s natural to stress to students that academics come first.”

He notes that sports mirror education in many ways. You often can learn more from losing than from winning.

“Handling yourself well as a winner is something to be learned, but it isn’t as difficult as behaving responsibly when you lose,” he said. “These things offer real life lessons.”

But he’s quick to add that “VHS students get it.”

“Our students are bright, enthusiastic, spirited and filled with pride in their school,” he said. “Athletics is simply another club activity which, like all our club activities, gives students a chance to succeed and feel good about themselves and their school.” ●



Carol Skidmore

Math Supervisor, NHHS

Years ago North Math Supervisor Carol Skidmore made her decision. She would be a stay at home mom and raise her four children.

“This was important to me,” she said. “I’m happy with that decision, and I’ve never regretted it.”

In the meantime she sold Tupperware, started a food co-op, and provided day care for three children and their working parents, all of which allowed her to be there for her children. And all that time she loved math. So building on that, she went nights to Kean University (still remaining available to her children) and got her degree in Mathematics.

Beginning in 1994, her children grown, she taught two years in Springfield before coming to North in ‘96.

“I’ve always loved math and knew that many were afraid of it,” she said. “I felt if I could reach young people and help them dispel their fear, they might even learn to like math. Even if they didn’t like it, they might not be so afraid anymore.”

But when it comes to new challenges, Carol Skidmore herself is never afraid. She observes things that interest her, tells herself “I think I can do that,” and then proceeds to prove it. Over the years she obtained a Master’s, which included supervisory certification. When the Math Supervisor position became available, that little voice went >>>

< *Carol Skidmore*

off in her head again. She is now in her second year.

"I like decision making, and I enjoy a challenge," she said. "I just love teaching in general, and I love seeing others learn. This position just expands on all that."

Like most fine educators her true love is the students. She is constantly amazed at how much they know, their personal gifts, and their take on the world from every point of the spectrum. And she is enjoying her "second life."

"I truly loved being a mom," she said. "And now I guess I mother our students a bit as well. I enjoy their insight, their innocence and especially their energy. Being a teacher and being a mom are not entirely unrelated. It takes hard work, practice and dedication to be good at both." ●



Nancy Anne Castello
English Teacher, VHS

Not so long ago, as a reporter for the *Hunterdon Democrat*, English teacher Nancy Anne Castello covered the news at VHS. Now, every day, she is part of that news.

But it's been a winding path to the classroom. A graduate in Journalism from Rutgers Newark, she worked in New York City doing marketing research before returning to Rutgers for her Master's in Writing. During that time she received a grant as an adjunct professor of Freshman English Composition.

"I found that I enjoyed teaching far more than I did taking graduate courses," she said.

Completing a Master's in Education at Rutgers and Montclair State, she spent three years teaching English at Ridge High School, and four years with the *Hunterdon Democrat*. Then she came home.

"I love it here," she said. "What stands out most besides our great students is the incomparable support I get from my peers. There is such a team atmosphere here. Everyone pulls together."

Mrs. Castello, in addition to serving as advisor to the award winning *Viking View*, heads a vibrant student volunteer network. Under her supervision students make four visits annually to High Bridge Elementary School assisting children with their writing. Her volunteers also make regular weekend visits to the Little Brook Nursing Home in Lebanon.

Yet with all that, one of the things she loves best about teaching is the opportunity to bring her passion for writing and great literature to her students.

"As a teacher there are so many wonderful things you can give to students, like getting them to read, appreciate and enjoy Shakespeare," she said.

She also notes a special affection she feels for her seniors.

"They are standing at such a threshold," she said. "Even they don't understand how powerful this time is for them. It's a privilege to be a part of their lives at a time like this."

But no matter the class, VHS offers an "overwhelmingly good and respectful group of students who want to do well."

"They're fun because you can really challenge them," she said. "You can demand perfection from them and, more often than not, they deliver." ●



Charlie Schmidt
History Teacher, NHHS

When students ask him how he knows so much, he says it's because "I've been around since Noah."

In reality history teacher Charlie Schmidt has been "around" for 29 years. And the reason he knows so much is because he enjoys the greatest gift a teacher can possess: an intense passion for his subject.

"The things you enjoy and regard as important are the things that usually stick," he said. "Passing my love for history on to students is a reward greater than any paycheck can bring." >>>

< *Charlie Schmidt*

Still, Mr. Schmidt kind of snuck up on teaching. A North graduate, he received a BA in History from Rider College and ultimately a Master's from Trenton State (TCNJ). He returned to his alma mater in 1975 as a teacher's aide and then served a year as a substitute.

"I saw some outstanding teachers during that time," he said. "Yet I believed I could do just as well, maybe even better. So I gave it a try."

A "history buff" since early elementary school, Mr. Schmidt was confident he could bring his passion alive in the classroom. He believes his sincere, unabashed love for history has helped him do so.

"It's a matter of perseverance," he said. "A teacher can never give up, especially on his students. Apathy in the classroom is not an option. It must be challenged again and again till you break through."

He reminds students that they themselves are living history. The clothes they wear, the expressions they use, and the foods they eat are all part of their own era. One day this will all be someone else's nostalgia.

After 29 years, the love of history and the rewards of teaching are still very much alive. When the passion goes, Mr. Schmidt promises to "hang up my spikes."

"I've never second guessed my career choice," he said. "Each day I attempt to inspire young people with something I've loved all my life. Does it really get any better than that? ●



Donna Exley

Health and Physical Education Teacher, VHS

After a year at North, Donna Exley began a 30-year career as teacher and softball coach at VHS. In fact, it was the very day the school opened for business (September '75). That June, she brought home the school's first Delaware

River Conference Softball Championship. Ironically, that team included her current Assistant Coach Heidi Hintz.

"Every day is different, and you can't say it's ever monotonous," she said. "I can say with complete honesty that VHS is the very heart of me."

The feeling is apparently mutual, for Mrs. Exley was recently inducted into the VHS Hall of Fame.

"I am pretty much overwhelmed by that," she said. "Imagine being honored for doing something you love to do."

Loving it is one thing, doing it remarkably well is another. Under her direction, the success of the school's annual Blood Drive has been recognized on both the state and national level. Each year a significant percentage of the student body lines up (literally) to offer "15 minutes to save a life."

As a 30-year coach, Mrs. Exley fondly recalls the slow but steady changes in society that finally brought female athletes the recognition they deserved.

"When it became apparent that girls could actually be respected for their achievements in sports, it was just remarkable," she said. "It changed everything. A girl could be intelligent, attractive and/or skilled in sports and be equally admired for any or all of those qualities."

She sees sports and teaching as working hand in hand to meet what she considers the ultimate goal of every good educator: to see their graduates leave each June as better human beings.

And after providing three decades worth of just such graduates, is Donna Exley beginning to look a bit further down the road?

"It's still fun," she said. "My students renew me every single day. Teaching is my life, and I must say I see no end in sight." ●

Mission Statement

The North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District, a district committed to innovation, personal excellence, high achievement and community partnership, provides all students with personalized opportunities through a broad spectrum of exemplary educational experiences to develop their fullest potential, to foster lifelong learning and to become responsible citizens in a continually changing society.