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350 East Main Road, Middletown, RI 02842
(401) 842-6500 | MiddletownRI.com

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CONTACT: Matt Sheley at (401) 842-6543 or msheley@middletownri.com



MIDDLETOWN “TEACHER OF THE YEAR” CATHY PALKOVIC

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (MAY 24, 2023) – “When you see that light bulb go off, that they get something they didn’t before and look at you like it was magic, that’s what it’s all about.”

In a sentence, that’s why Cathy Palkovic is an educator and loves every day in the classroom.

Recently, the third grade teacher at Aquidneck School was named the 2023 “Middletown Teacher Of The Year,” an honor bestowed by her peers from the National Education Association Middletown union.

“We need good, caring people to teach,” Palkovic said during a break from her lessons in her upstairs classroom at the Reservoir Road elementary school. “If we have any hope, we need high-quality teachers to help create and grow that foundation with the children because they’re our future.”

Working for the past 28 years in elementary education in Middletown, Palkovic recently celebrated her 31st anniversary with her husband Matt. The couple has two sons, Steven and David.

Getting her start as a substitute teacher with the district, Palkovic — pronounced Pal Kah Vick — taught at Forest Avenue School and the now closed Kennedy School before coming to Aquidneck School 18 years ago.

The daughter of the late Paul and Patricia Parsonage, both were well known faces in the local school system and on the Middletown School Committee, which helped steer her towards a career in teaching.

“My mom was the dean at Gaudet Middle School, so I saw that side of education and my dad was a janitor at a number of our schools and the head of maintenance when he retired, so I guess you could say I’ve seen it all,” Palkovic said, smiling. “Their influence was definitely something I still feel to this day.”



Watch her during the “Morning Meeting” portion of her lesson and you can see Palkovic connects with every one of her pupils.

Serving as a warm up and positive opener for the day, Palkovic interacts easily with her approximately 25 students, who are seated on the rugged floor, all eyes following the fun, fast moving exercise.

Students naturally raise their hands when asked about their thoughts on the classroom “Quote of the Day” — “Don’t go through life, grow through life.” When one blurts out an answer excitedly, Palkovic gently reminds everyone to raise their hand to get called on.

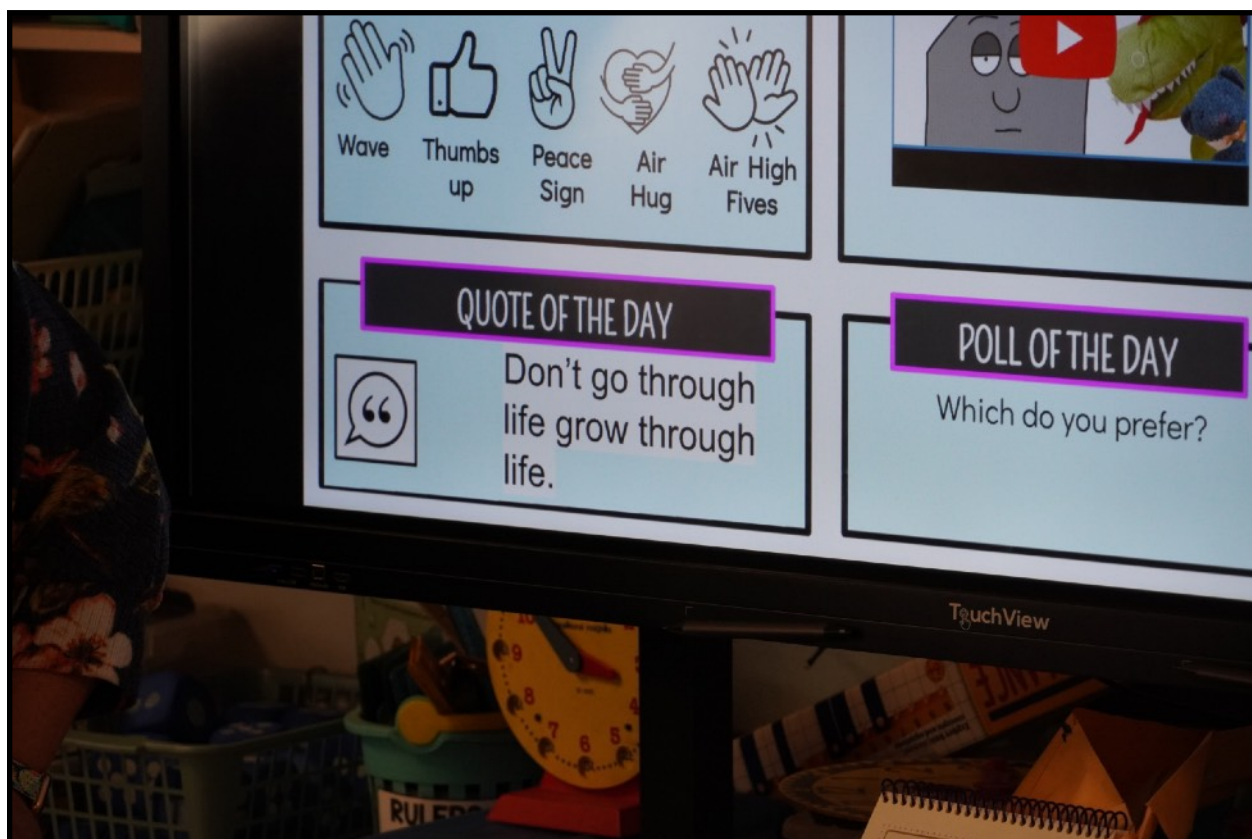
The lesson moves quickly to the next item “Poll of the Day” without pause, where students are asked which character they prefer from “The Bad Guys” movie, Mr. Wolf or Mr. Shark.

While most say they like Mr. Wolf because he’s the boss of the “Bad Guys” team, Palkovic said she gravitates towards Mr. Shark because he might be related to the Aquidneck School mascot Sharkie.

The students and teacher then have a pleasant discussion about the characters for several minutes, with an engaged back and forth that seems to include every one of her pupils. From there, Palkovic shifts gears to a video about feelings and how to cope with a case of the “Mehs” and move on in a positive manner.

At no point, does Palkovic’s instruction feel like a boring old lecture, but more of an all inclusive two-way chat, mirroring the latest themes in education.

“I love what I do and I’m constantly revising my lessons and fine tuning them,” Palkovic said. “There’s always something new to learn and just before the pandemic, I was doing quite a bit to become a better math teacher. Those lessons have helped me in the classroom today and really get all my students thinking in new and exciting ways.”



In a notice to the district about Palkovic, Superintendent Rosemarie K. Kraeger applauded her continued outstanding efforts. She also noted Palkovic is a tech coach and works tirelessly on the district's mathematics curriculum.

"In her application to the Middletown Public Schools, Cathy stated 'Each student is a unique individual who needs understanding and guidance in order to reach their ultimate potential.'" Kraeger said. "Cathy also referred to the critical role an educator has in addressing social/emotional needs of students for them to be successful. Cathy has stayed true to those core beliefs as an educator in Middletown."

Asked about teaching in today's world, Palkovic thinks every educator in Middletown could be selected as a "Teacher of the Year" after emerging from COVID-19.

Facing increased demands, learning loss and other obstacles from the pandemic, Palkovic knows how much more she's working in her classroom than ever before, a message mirrored by her peers.

"I get it and why it's happening, but that doesn't change what it is," Palkovic said. "The supports that we used to have just aren't there anymore. Students are having a tougher and tougher time after COVID, but the three to four reading specialists we used to have and other help is gone."

Still, Palkovic said she and her fellow Middletown teachers do everything possible to hold the line and provide the best, most well rounded education for their students, no matter the needs.

"When I was named, it's an honor," Palkovic said. "To know how much high quality work happens across this district everyday, it's humbling. I'm not one to talk about myself and to be put in the spotlight like this, there are so many other teachers who are deserving of this recognition."

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