

[New Search](#) [Return to results](#) [Printer Friendly](#)

Perinton-Fairport Post (NY)

Children are her legacy

Published: August 28, 2003

By BENJAMIN WACHS / bwachs@mpnewspapers.com

Almost every morning for the last eight years, Jefferson Avenue Elementary School Co-Principal Barbara Fry would get on the public address system, read the morning announcements, say the pledge of allegiance and end with 'Thank you and have a great day.' "

It became such a morning ritual that school officials say it wasn't until Fry fell ill with cancer and stopped reading the announcements that some students realized "Thank you and have a great day " were not the last words to the pledge of allegiance.

School goes on, the announcements will still be read, but the friendly voice is no longer heard. On Aug. 14 Barbara Fry passed away at age 56. She died at home.

It was a sad ending to a story that had once seemed an uplifting tale of survival. Diagnosed with cancer of the lungs last Christmas, Fry had been on leave since the beginning of the calendar year, but she began to drop in to school more and more as her prognosis improved. She even finished out the last two months of the school year working full time, and school officials, parents, and even Fry herself had hoped she would be returning to school again soon.

"(We) had seen her back with so much vitality, and she was a good example of how someone could come back after that kind of a treatment," said Diane McClure, president of the Jefferson Avenue PTA. "We had so much hope, she gave hope to others."

But her condition took a turn for the worse in July.

Kim Carrol, whose youngest son is in fifth grade and whose oldest is beginning middle school this year, said her children are "very upset " by the news of Fry's death.

"When they found out she was sick, all of the kids wrote her notes wishing her to get well soon and that they missed her," Carrol said. "When she was back, they all wanted to pop their heads in and say hello. When I told them the other night that Mrs. Fry had passed away, they were very sad. She'll always be in our hearts."

Fairport Superintendent Bill Cala remembered that "she touched the lives of so many adults and children. Her love of children is what always guided her as she made decisions about their well-being."

Fry, a native of Allentown, Pa., moved to the Fairport area in the fall of 1974 when her husband, Barry, took a job with the Volpex Corp. When her own son turned 10, she decided to return to school, first at Monroe Community

College, then at Nazareth College. After graduating, she began her career with the Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES in 1980, teaching special education in a self-contained classroom.

She moved to the Fairport district six years later, performing the same job, then went into administration a year after that. She was coordinator for special education until 1994, when she became co-principal at Jefferson Avenue.

She decorated her office with stuffed white polar bears and student drawings, and kept a jar of little puff-ball people named "Weeples." She quickly became known to parents and co-workers alike as someone who genuinely put the needs of children first, no matter what.

"She always tried to do what was best for the kids," Carrol said. "From a PTA standpoint, she was very helpful. Anything we wanted to accomplish, she supported. From a parent standpoint, anytime I needed anything - if I needed to talk to her about a teacher, or my child - she had an open door policy, and it wasn't a door that needed to be knocked on. I'd stick my head through the door, say 'Barb, do you have a minute?' and she always had time."

McClure called her "an inspiration" and "a role model," both to children and to people who take care of children. "We had 900 plus students at the school, but she called them by name," McClure said. "Even with my own children, range from 9 to 14 years old right now, she remembered the ones who were gone. She was a presence in the school, always walking around the halls."

Each Halloween she wore a costume - she was an M & M; a candy corn; the Cat in the Hat - and when the school had a hoedown she danced right alongside students.

"She wasn't a ham outside of school," said Barry Fry. "She wasn't that kind of person generally in terms of a party, but she loved the kids and really liked to do those kind of things at school with them."

Fry was also an active community member, volunteering for the American Red Cross and for her church, First Congregational United Church of Christ in Fairport.

"She just seemed to have a well-rounded life," said McClure. "She was able to be a good example for all of us, professionally and in balancing other areas of your life."

The news of her death came at a time when the school was empty of children. The grief counselor that the district sent out was to help members of the staff.

"We spent time talking about Barb and having a good cry and a few laughs, just initially to get over that shock and that sadness," said fifth-grade teacher Kelly Roethel.

But the real school remembrance won't come until the children are back.

"We haven't decided yet, but we definitely plan on doing something as a school to remember her," Roethel said. "Probably something outside, because Barb loved the outdoors."

Carrol said waiting until school starts is appropriate: "It was always about the kids. That's the legacy that she'll have left."

A memorial service for Barbara Fry will be held Saturday, Sept. 6, at 2 p.m. in the First Congregational United Church of Christ, 26 E. Church St. Contributions in her name may be made to the Mary Cariola Children's Center, 1000 Elmwood Ave., Rochester, NY 14620, an establishment dedicated to helping children of special needs.

