

Volunteer of the Month – Janet Hayes

By Bernie Michel

I was told that if I were looking for an interesting volunteer to interview I should talk to Janet Hayes, who volunteers at West Middle School, as an early grades reading tutor. I made the phone call, and she agreed to let me meet her for the third and final Thursday morning session. I got there before the children arrived, and introduced myself, explaining this column as a part of the News & Views and AHNA. Her response was “do you know of any volunteer opportunities in June?”

In the minute before the students arrived I discovered that she had been tutoring and volunteering as a classroom helper at WMS for two years, and before that, at the Expeditionary Learning Academy at Moylan School and Betances STEM Magnet School. All in all, she’s been a volunteer in the schools for twelve years. She was a nurse before a stroke changed her life in 2005, so the volunteering is just a fill-in that began after the stroke. It left her requiring a wheelchair to get around, without the use of her right arm, and with speech challenges. It does not seem to have affected her determination to be productive.

Stroke aside, Ms. Hayes is amazing. I have been involved with education and elementary school students enough to understand the challenges and to appreciate someone who does it really well. Janet Hayes does it really well. While young minds are very curious - the upside, they are not very focused, which is the down side. She is able to feed the curiosity while guiding their attention to make maximum use of the 20 minutes she has with the two or sometimes three students she tutors at a time. It’s not just me either, Nicole Rodriguez, the Volunteer Coordinator at WMS marvels at her abilities, “she is great because she relates what they are learning to their lives. She is also the most dependable volunteer that we have.”

When I asked her if she preferred the younger students she said “Yes, older students are tough” and when I asked about training she said “None. On the job training. I’ve been doing it for 12 years.”

For more photos go to <https://photos.app.goo.gl/sDeBXf5aKWYFvGir1>

For an opportunity to make a difference in a young life also, contact Nicole Rodriguez (860) 695-5562 or nrodriguez@bgchartford.org

To help support the Volunteer Resource Center at West Middle School, contact Sam Gray at (860) 929-7660 or sgray@bgchartford.org

