

Going To the Head of the Class



As a sophomore at Mineral Ridge High School in 2003, Mike Austin contemplated a career in education. After talking with his guidance counselor, he decided to enroll in the Career Path for the Teaching Profession program at the TCTC.

Patti Krivosh, program instructor, said that Austin ranked at the top of the class. "Mike could easily be a teacher's poster child for the perfect student. He arrived in class every day armed with a great sense of humor, a greater sense of humility and the greatest work ethic ever. He never wavered in his decision to become a teacher; he set his goals and worked hard to reach them."

Today, Austin stands in front of the class as the Title One Reading Teacher at Bristol Elementary school. Although, he has realized his career goal, those who know him best believe the best is yet to come. This is his story.

Austin success at the TCTC is predated by his accomplishments as a student in Mineral Ridge. Carol Mogulich, Guidance Counselor, said, "I can't say enough nice things about Mike. He was a class leader, outstanding student and a gentleman. I believe that anyone that you talked with at our school would say the same thing about him."

Ron Toth was Austin's history teacher and coach at Mineral Ridge. He stated, "Mike was co-captain of the football team and a very valuable member of my track team. What I remember most was that he was a positive leader who motivated others by example and

encouragement. As a student, he always went beyond what was expected of him. He was a critical thinker and a very gifted writer."

Austin retains fond memories of his 10 year experiences in Mineral Ridge and the two years that he spent at the TCTC. "I left a very good school and I entered a very good school. My time in the CPTP program confirmed my desire to become a teacher.

When I started college, I had a jump start on my classmates. I had more than a working knowledge of educational concepts. Mrs. Krivosh provided the opportunity for her students to demonstrate them."

Students in the CPTP program engage in field experiences to observe and work with area teachers in elementary, middle and high school settings. Austin said, "We graded papers, tutored students and helped in a variety of ways. It was an invaluable experience for me. I learned how schools operate from the inside out. I found that I enjoyed the small children the best and decided to major in elementary education in college."

Good role models are an essential part of the nurturing process with any profession. Austin says that Patti Krivosh serves her students in this capacity. "She is a good listener, she is professional in her conduct, and she is caring and compassionate. If you are around her for any length of time, you learn to put children first. When a teacher does this, everything usually falls into place."

When asked to identify what the public does not understand about teachers. Austin cited the time spent preparing lessons and grading papers after school. "Education is not an 8:00 to 3:00 job. You are always thinking about alternative ways to reach kids. To be successful, you have to work hard to help them learn. One of the things I learned from Mrs. Krivosh is that all kids learn differently. Some of them don't get the answer right the first time. The challenge is to intervene successfully with the ones that are struggling. I think the first place that you start is by creating a positive classroom environment where kids feel valued and respected."

During his interview, Austin was asked, "How would your principal describe you to others? He replied, "I hope he would say that I fit in well with the staff and that the students enjoy me as a teacher." Chris Dray, Elementary Principal at Bristol, agreed with this assessment, but provided more detail. "Mike has an excellent work ethic, is organized and is well regarded by his peers on staff. His students hold him in very high regard."

In the same sense that a million Frenchmen can't be wrong, it is hard to question the consensus opinion about Mike expressed by so many professional educators. The most valid endorsement, however, is provided by the students in his first grade class.

Colby Turner said, "Mr. Austin helps us to become better readers. He is a fun teacher that plays games. My favorite is the one with the magnets."

Billie Miller said, "Mr. Austin is nice to us. He helps us to sound out words. He makes learning

fun. I like him.”

Reagan Hall said, “He knows what is best for us and he is very, very nice. He is a good teacher.”

Although he lacks the experience and wisdom that accompanies age, Mike Austin appears to have mastered a fundamental principal of education. Every kid is a somebody to him.

Stacia Tauscher has written extensively about educational practices for young children. She said, “We worry so much about what a child will become tomorrow that we forget what he is today. Here is a prediction. Mike Austin won’t ever forget.