

TCTC Teacher Recognized for Patience and Understanding



Whoever coined the phrase, It's nice to be important but it's more important to be nice was thinking about a person like Nancy Kitzmiller. Students, parents, administrators and colleagues describe her as warm hearted, patient and caring. She is the instructor for the Hospitality Services Program at the TCTC.

An interview with a cross section of Kitzmiller's students shed light on her demeanor. Shane Freeman, from the Lakeview school district is a two-year completer of the Hospitality Program. He stated, "Mrs Kitzmiller makes you feel good about yourself. It's okay to make a mistake in her classroom. She helps you to learn from it. She stressed the importance of cleanliness and maintaining high standards for sanitation. I use the skills that she taught me every day in my job at the Chop House Restaurant.

Samantha Peace from Girard said, "She is a wonderful role model for her students. She is very kind and thoughtful. She never passes out work and says, "Do this." Instead, she guides you until you can complete the assignment on your own. She is a great teacher, but she is also a good person. If I ever gain a position of authority, I will treat other people, the way that Mrs. K treated all of us."

When asked about the importance of using patience as a tool for teaching, Kitzmiller commented about her own experiences as a student. "I had instructors that were very understanding and I had a few that were not. I decided that if I became a teacher, I would concentrate on producing learning instead of stress. I try to see the best in my students and to maintain a positive attitude each day. Almost always, they respond by giving you their best effort in return."

Kitzmilller's career started in the Warren City as a Home Economics teacher. After taking a 14-year hiatus to raise her four sons, she returned to the profession at Maplewood High School and then the Gordon James Career Center. She is currently in her 16th year at the Trumbull Career & Technical Center. Her undergraduate degree is in Family and Consumer Science. She obtained her masters in in 1997. She has also been a presenter at two ACTE National Conventions.

Hospitality Services is a two-year program that prepares students for a variety of careers in the fast growing industry. In their junior year, students work through a rotation of in-school job sites that prepare them for off-site positions at area hospitals during their senior year.

During their progression in the program, students acquire skills in a wide variety of diverse areas. These include housekeeping, safety, sanitation, laundry, food preparation, guest services and banquet set up.

The senior students in the program represent the face of the TCTC to the public because they work at St. Joseph's Health Center. A strong emphasis is placed on accountability, attendance and teamwork. Kitzmilller stated, "Employers expect a task to be completed to the standards established for the position. We teach our kids to look out for each other because every link in the chain must be strong. This is the reality waiting for them on the other side of graduation. Teachers can't be afraid to do the same work as the students. Any skill that we learn and any job that we do necessitate that we role model what we teach. I work side by side with the students."

During her 16^{-year} tenure at the TCTC, the school has evolved from a strictly vocational setting-preparing student for entry year jobs after graduation into one of the top 50 Career/Technical Centers in the US. Kitzmilller commented on the changes she has observed. "We have always offered job training courses, with qualified teachers who hold industry certifications. Our students receive the opportunity to test their skills in competitive regional, state and national events. In the past few years, we have invested in state of the art equipment to make students ready for employment in their career fields. Additionally, our academics are much more rigorous. A much higher percentage of our students are continuing their education in college or trade school."

The textbook, the lecture, the note taking and the homework assignments are necessary staples in the educational process. Learning requires effort. Jodi Riedel, Kitzmilller's Supervisor, spoke to her success in the classroom. "In addition to improving the basic skills of her students, Nancy possesses a sixth sense that is geared to the human dimension. Her kids know that she values them as unique individuals who have great potential. She will do anything within her power to help them. This impacts their achievement in a powerful manner."

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that reads, “With time and patience, the mulberry leaf becomes a silk. Everyone who knows Nancy Kitzmiller will read these words, reflect about her relationships with kids, and nod in agreement. This is what she does.