

HILLSDALE

DAILY NEWS

40 YEARS OF MEMORIES

Longtime Head Start teacher retiring

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By Nancy Hastings

PITTSFORD — Linda Crawford of Reading is boxing up 40 years worth of supplies and memories as she nears retirement on Nov. 30 from teaching at Head Start in Hillsdale County. Crawford, 65, taught in Osseo, Reading, Hillsdale, Camden and Pittsford and has a following of grateful students wherever she goes. She's taught a second generation of students whose parents recall her as their first teacher. "I started as a volunteer in the Head Start Day Care program when my daughter was in it," Crawford said. "I subbed with a classroom in Osseo and was hired to teach in 1972."

Though she lives in Reading and works in Pittsford, she formerly lived in Pittsford while working all over the county. The job of teaching 3 to 5-year-olds is enduring to her. "I've just always enjoyed children of that age," she said. "To come, they have to be 3 by Dec. 1, so some of them are younger when we get them."

Preparing young minds for kindergarten is a challenge, but always memorable. "They never forget their first teacher," she said. The changes she's witnessed over the years are memorable as well. "There's a lot more paperwork and assessments now," Crawford said. "The documentation for entering kindergarten is more than when my children were there." Requirements for entering kindergarten ensure that children know at least 10 alphabet letters and 10 numbers, so that they are developmentally further along.

"If they don't go to preschool they are behind, unless their parents work with them," Crawford said. "It takes the parents working with the children, otherwise they get lost in the shuffle especially when there are 30 or more kids in the classroom without the individualized attention." Watching the children become "little individuals" is part of the pleasure of the job. "By the time they leave, they become self sufficient and feel like they can do anything," Crawford said.

For her first five years on the job, Crawford said she did home visits, where she could do development activities with the whole family. "That was rewarding," she said. "The families had to be involved." Though frequent home visits are a thing of the past, Head Start teachers still do two home visits a year. "It's neat to see the transition (to kindergarten) for the kids," she said. "Parents realize it's important, while kids get to see their parents take it seriously."

Some community events she has enjoyed over the years are the Kiwanis Christmas party for Head Start students and the St. Jude Trike-a-Thon that teaches valuable safety lessons and the benefit of helping others. Head Start teacher Terra French said Crawford has been a wonderful mentor. "Linda and I have worked together since 2001 when I started student teaching," French said. "She's always there for anyone, has a lot of patience and is very approachable." Seeing her colleagues each day is what Crawford said she will miss most. A party was held Nov. 18 in her honor, but her last day (Nov. 30) will be sure to bring many tears, she said. "I've worked with some wonderful people over the years," Crawford said. After wintering in Florida, Crawford said she will most likely be a sub for Head Start, as well as a volunteer.



Crawford takes time out to reminisce with colleague and friend Terra French, whom she has mentored over the years. NANCY HASTINGS PHOTO

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