

ARBOS AWARD

MARY ELLEN BARRETH CITATION

ARBOS AWARD FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION



Mary Ellen Barreth “officially” retired from teaching in June 2015 but this servant leader is not letting that slow her down. She continues to work within the Holy Family Roman Catholic Separate School Division as a substitute teacher. And when you can’t find Mary Ellen teaching in Saskatchewan, you might

find her supporting the many international teachers she has helped on school missions to Belize, Burkina Faso, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru and Tanzania. That passion and dedication are why she is receiving the Arbos for Contributions to Education and the Teaching Profession.

As a student, Mary Ellen graduated from Miller Comprehensive Catholic High School in Regina in June 1980. She obtained her teaching certificate and then later her bachelor of education degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 1988. She and her family moved to Estevan that same year. Since then, Mary Ellen has had the honour of working at every Holy Family school as a teacher, a coordinator or an administrator.

From 2002 to 2005, while employed as the administrator at St. Mary’s School, she went on to pursue her master’s degree in curriculum and instruction. From 2008 to 2010 she was the curriculum coordinator for the Holy Family Roman Catholic Separate School Division. From 2010 up until she retired, Mary Ellen was the administrator at Sacred Heart School/École Sacré Coeur.

Her many leadership roles have included being a member of Council, local implementation and negotiation committee chair and former president of the Estevan Catholic School Teachers’ Association. She was the first president of the newly created Holy Family Teachers’ Association. The current association would not be what

it is today without her. In addition, she’s been a member of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Retirement Plan board for more than eight years.

Mary Ellen is also a talented singer – a gift she has shared over the last 14 years in her role as choir leader for her local church and the school-based Praise Choir. For the last 15 years she has been the school representative to the parish and she has also produced the student-led musical every two years up until her retirement. She’s been instrumental in raising funds for school playground equipment and for the benches, outdoor teepee and green spaces. She even created a legacy for retiring teachers by inviting them to plant a tree to be enjoyed by future generations.

Mary Ellen was the 2019-20 intern program supervisor at the University of Regina. Very soon she will be visiting the Maple Bear Canadian School in Brazil, where she’s previously helped support the curriculum and implementation of the English Immersion program.

Friend and colleague Christa Walton describes Mary Ellen as a “reliable and loving daughter, a strong and steady farmer’s wife (to husband Brent), a proud mama bear (to Nicole, a social worker in Regina, and Joe, a teacher in Alberta), a doting grandmother (to Atlee and newest addition Ander), a steadfast friend and a devoted member in her faith ... No matter where you are or who you are, Mary Ellen makes you feel like you are the centre of her world.”

The proof of this can be seen in the many lives touched by Mary Ellen’s joyous and generous spirit.



A CONVERSATION WITH MARY ELLEN BARRETH

When did you decide you wanted to be a teacher?

I wanted to be a teacher my whole life. Children often change their minds about what they want to be when they grow up. I never did. I was going to be a teacher. It was a decision very much supported by my parents.

What did you enjoy most about teaching?

What I enjoy about teaching is when former students come for a visit. I look at these wonderful young ladies and gentlemen and feel proud that I had a small part in helping them become the men and women they are today. When they return and bring their children to enrol in your school you feel, well, old, but secondly you feel proud that you made a great connection with these families, that they trust you with their children and that you can be part of raising the next generation together.

Why did you feel it was important to support teachers and students in other countries?

It's about reaching across borders and sharing knowledge and experiences with each other. Everyone talks about the global environment and the global economy. Growing a global community is the foundation

for everything else and it starts with our children. It's about connecting with other cultures and communities, building networks and working collaboratively to build a strong global community and hope for the future.

Why did you create a tree-planting legacy for retired teachers?

Planting a legacy tree is a metaphor for the lifelong process of education. Having retired teachers plant trees symbolizes the foundation, strength and fruit-bearing branches that teachers foster year after year, enabling students to stand strong throughout their lives.

What impact have your colleagues and students made on your life?

I have been blessed in my life and teaching career. I have been challenged and supported, strong and vulnerable, faith-filled and lonely, confident and confused. Through it all there have been great colleagues supporting my journey as well as students, young and old, bringing me joy and making me laugh every day. I am so grateful! It's the secret to a wonderful career.