

## Gallup Central teacher walks winding road

Written by Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor  
Friday, 10 November 2023 07:00

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### Career path leads him to high school biology

Each month, Camille's Sidewalk Café recognizes one local teacher within the Gallup area for his or her determination to help students go above and beyond. Prospective teachers are nominated by students who feel they deserve to be recognized.

This month's award went to Scott Thatcher, a science teacher at Gallup Central High School.

Thatcher has been at Gallup Central for eight years now, but he didn't always want to be a teacher.

He grew up in Adams County, a small farming county in southwestern Ohio. After high school, he was accepted into Ohio State University, but he only completed his freshman year before deciding college wasn't for him. He entered the workforce by building railroad cars, working his way up to becoming the crane operator.

But after a couple years of railroad work, Thatcher became concerned about the toll the manual labor would have on his body if he kept at it for another 30 years, so he decided to go back to school.

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At this point in his career, he was about as far away from teaching as he could be. But Thatcher said his family always encouraged him to be a teacher.

“A lot of people in my family are teachers, they always encouraged me to take education classes, and I said ‘there’s no way I’m going to teach a bunch of kids. I just don’t want to do it,’” Thatcher said.

His aunt Joyce McDowell and his grandma Lois Newman always said he would make a great teacher. McDowell said he was often taking his niece and nephews on educational adventures.

“He has three nephews and a niece and he’s always wanting to do something experiential where they could learn,” she said. “We live close to the Ohio River, and I remember when they were pretty young, he took them on a ferry ride from the Ohio side to the Kentucky side and back just because he wanted them to experience a different form of transportation. It’s like a natural instinct for him to teach, to want to show kids something.”

After completing his degree in biology, Thatcher had a somewhat difficult time trying to find a job. While he was unemployed, he started substitute teaching, and he said he began to understand the passion behind teaching. He eventually got a job as a safety inspector with the Ohio Department of Agriculture, but the teaching seed had been planted.

“I told myself If I don’t love this [Department of Agriculture job] within two years, I’m going to quit, and go back to school and teach, because I found out I liked teaching,” Thatcher said.

And that’s exactly what he did. He attended the Alice Lloyd College in eastern Kentucky. The school is a work college, so its students are required to work 10 hours a week for the college in exchange for free tuition.

Thatcher completed his teaching certificate at the age of 30, and he’s been teaching ever since.

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Ohio schools weren't hiring after he received his certificate, so he headed west. His first teaching job was in Pinon, Arizona, where he taught for two years before moving back to Ohio. After working in Ohio for another two years, he decided he wanted to head back out west, and that's when he learned about Gallup.

"The [Gallup Central High School] principal called and said, 'we could use you' and I said 'I can be there in two weeks.' I never even looked up the school online or anything, I just started driving," Thatcher said.

Eight years later, he's still enjoying it.

"The work is extraordinary but the rewards are worth it. The stress and work are just overwhelming, but the reward is worth it," he said.

A former student nominated him for the award, and although it's been a couple years since she was in his classroom, Thatcher said he really appreciated knowing he'd made an impact on her life.

"... I helped this young lady. You don't really hear that when you're doing it. Not many kids come up and say 'you really helped me,'" he said.

Thatcher said that Newman, his 'Mamaw,' influences how he teaches to this day. She was a teacher for 26 years, and even earned her master's degree while raising children.

In a letter Thatcher wrote to Newman a couple years ago, he explained how her impact has helped him become a better teacher.

"I try to share the blessing and understanding and acceptance I learned from you with my students. Just know that every interaction with a student I have, you are the blueprint I've used," he wrote.

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McDowell said she and Newman and the rest of the family are all very proud of Thatcher and his approach to teaching.

"They can be a happy kid, a sad kid, a kid that's excelling, a kid that's struggling, but he really tries to figure that child out, and to me that's what's special about Scott," she said. "We're just proud of him and we think he tries to make learning fun for his students but also relevant."

By Molly Ann Howell  
Managing Editor