

Popular JM Principal Steps Down

By Lee Borrowman

The Joaquin Moraga Middle School community was shaken and saddened to hear late last month that Principal Catherine Mikes will be leaving the Moraga School District due to health reasons. Mikes was diagnosed with cancer in mid-June, and has decided to focus on her family and health over the next several months as she undergoes various treatments. The District is beginning its search for Mikes' replacement, but those who worked with her believe she will be a tough act to follow.

Mikes has been highly regarded as a dedicated and "hands-on" principal. JM Vice Principal Brad Cam said of her, "She worked tirelessly throughout the year to implement the district's strategic plan and to make JM a more student-centered environment."

She was proud of the school and its students, and liked to attend and participate in classes. On any given day, visitors to JM might have encountered Mikes speaking with delight about the first edition of the newspaper created by Journalism students, or covered in red clay after joining the Ceramics class.

The walls of Mikes' office were plastered with "to-do" lists; goals were checked off as they were attained. Although she had only just completed the first year of her appointment, Mikes already had many accomplishments under her belt. The school now has its first full-time counselor, Heidi Felt, who has worked closely with Mikes to institute a zero-tolerance policy regarding bullying. She coordinated improvements to the after school support program for at-risk students and oversaw the creation and implementation of a Writing Development Plan. She also worked on assessment strategies for math placement of incoming 6th graders, and as a result a cohort of incoming 6th graders in the 06-07 school year was identified and this group, when they become 8th graders, will comprise the first ever full Geometry class at JM. Mikes spearheaded the effort that resulted in JM being named a California Distinguished School this spring.

Mikes worked closely with teachers and with the support of the JM PTA also revamped the elective program at the school, increasing the availability of elective classes and offering some new and exciting choices such as a 6th grade Exploratory Wheel, in which students cycle through a variety of different courses during the year, and a video production/live broadcasting elective for 7th and 8th graders.

PTA President Erin Bydalek said, "I really enjoyed working with Catherine. She gave us a lot of access, and we worked in partnership with her to raise needed money for the site. She was able to initiate a lot of positive changes at JM, and was very supportive of PTA programs as well."

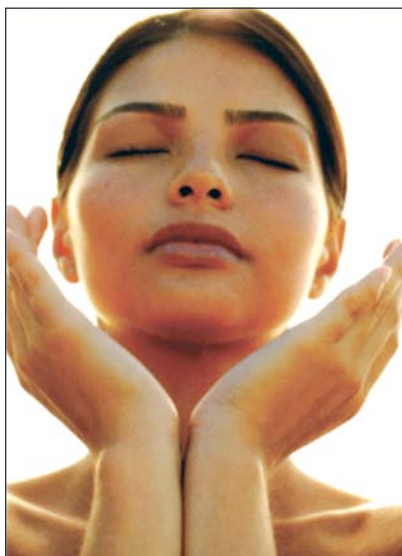
In a written statement to parents, Moraga School District Superintendent Richard Shafer said, "We are grateful for Ms. Mikes' many contributions during this past year. We wish her the very best in her recovery and in all her future endeavors. Our immediate priority will be to hire her replacement as soon as the best-qualified candidate can be selected - this process hasn't been worked out, but it is on a critical path. Parents, teachers, and



Brad Cam and Catherine Mikes
other stakeholders will be involved."

Photo by Dana Ludwig

Cam assures parents, "The administration and staff are determined to work diligently to ensure a smooth opening of school and implement the positive changes that Catherine initiated." Shafer will be working with Cam and other administrators over the summer. "I expect minimal disruption when students and staff begin to return in August," said Shafer.



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