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The rhythm of balance - LES's Mr. Moe finds rhythm inside and outside the classroom

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Lafayette Elementary School teacher Scott Moe
Photo Hien Clayton

There is a rhythm to reaching and teaching fifth graders that Lafayette Elementary School teacher Scott Moe finds to be magical - so much so that he's been in the classroom for the past 27 years. These days, when Moe is not in front of his 28 students keeping the rhythm for all of the different learning styles and unique personalities in his classroom, he can often be found on the back of a stage or rehearsing in a garage, keeping the rhythm for his band, Take Five.

Moe was around the same age as the children in his class when he became intrigued with drumming. "I remember sitting on the curb and watching the marching drum go by and doing everything I could not to blink, because I found it to be so fascinating," Moe says. "When it was time to choose band instruments, I knew right away that I wanted an instrument like drums or (as backup) the trombone - an instrument that had movement and noise."

On the day Moe and about nine other budding percussionists went to pick up their instruments, instead of the shiny silver drum kits they were expecting, they got tiny drum pads. "It was disappointing but I stuck with it," Moe recalls with a smile. Then the summer between seventh and eighth grades, his parents conditionally agreed to get him the drumming kit he always wanted as a birthday and Christmas present from them and many other relatives. "I had to promise to practice. I got the drum kit and they had to beg me to stop. I put on my headphones and played along with Led Zeppelin and the Beatles or whoever came on the radio. Then, the summer before ninth grade, I joined my first band."

The now 53-year-old Moe, who is the father of two teenagers, has been in multiple bands along his journey and connected with the members of Take Five during the pandemic. Like Moe, each of his bandmates have rich lives and balance daytime jobs and responsibilities, significant others and children. Moe and his bandmates rehearse weekly in a garage and have a performance gig each month. Like teaching, drumming in a band is both hard work and heart work for Moe.

"Sometimes when I'm breaking down the drums at 2 a.m. and getting ready to drive home, that I don't always enjoy. But, playing in front of people for hours at a time gives me such a great amount of joy. I live for that feeling," Moe says with a wide grin. "It's like teaching. Do I love report cards? No. But I love being with the kids and being a positive influence on them. And I love when they come back from Stanley Middle School or high school or after college and tell me that I made a difference or that fifth grade was their favorite. That is priceless."

In the classroom, it's the art of keeping the 28 students in his class engaged and excited about learning that keeps him on his toes and has even at times earned him a reputation as a stand-up comedian. "This is my stand-up improv (gig). The lesson and the content are set, but I've got a cast of 28 characters and I never quite know what any of them are going to throw out at me," Moe says. "Teaching is a job where you've got to be quick on your feet and it's probably a lot like improv comedy."

Something that Moe particularly loves about fifth graders is their creativity and their innovation. "There's the saying that if you give kids an inch, they'll take a mile. It's true for my fifth graders in the best possible way," Moe beams. "I can give them some basic instructions and the foundations for a lesson and they can take it and run with it."

Moe's students might say that their admiration for him has something to do with the way he shows up for them every day. "Mr. Moe makes everything more fun. Math is really hard for many people, but Mr. Moe finds ways to make it fun and interesting. He knows how to go with the flow," his student Hazel says. "I think it's so cool that my teacher has a hobby that he loves so much that he turned it into a job and I also feel lucky that he's my teacher." Another student, Kaylee, says she loves that her teacher is role modeling and that it is possible to do two things at once. "I think it's cool to have a teacher who is also a drummer."

Rose Suarez, the parent of Moe's student Antonio, thinks it's no coincidence that many students in Moe's class like math, even if they've traditionally found it hard, while also appreciating subjects like art and music.

"I'm almost emotional when I talk about him. He brings so much perspective and is really able to understand the kids with so many different needs and personalities and he's right there with them," Suarez says. "We hear all these reports about how music helps the brain and you see that when he's on stage. A lot of times he's got his eyes closed. He's totally in the moment and in the music. It's so good for kids and they're growing brains to know that life is more than just academics, that music can be important too."

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