

'We're shaping the future'

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER – "It makes me sad to see wasted potential," she says. "That's why I do what I do."

On her walls are plaques honoring her service in education. From her terms as president of the Choctaw County Education Association to her time of service on the state level, her office is filled with evidence of her 30 years as an educator.

And on her desk is another valued possession, a framed essay written by a student. It is a short article simply titled 'Walking in her Shoes' written by a young girl whose life she had touched in some way. But to Joy Seybold, it is a treasure, a token that tells her that she's doing something right.

Many would not envy her job as counselor at Choctaw County High School – her work with teens that tower over her small frame or the endless paperwork that fills her desk. But to her, it is her niche, her calling, the place where she was meant to be.

Growing up in Winterhaven, Florida, Seybold gravitated toward the field of education at an early age.

"I always loved school," she says. "It was a pleasure for me. It meant achievement."

Because of that love for school and through the encouragement of her parents, she chose education as her career.

"My parents – mainly my dad – wanted me to be independent, to be able to take care of myself," she explains. "Back then, about the only things available for women were nursing, secretarial jobs, or teaching. I picked teaching."

Seybold earned her bachelor's degree in education at what is now the University of Central Florida, and later earned her Master's. Although she felt drawn to teach high school English, she opted for elementary grades at first, in part because of her small stature.

"I was so small that people didn't think I could handle teenagers," she says with a laugh. "So I started out teaching elementary school at Tangelo Park in Orlando. I taught first grade."

Seybold moved to Choctaw County when her husband Dean began working with what was then American Can Company at the Naheola mill. She took her first job in the Choctaw County School System teaching at Lisman Junior High.

Times were difficult for the school system during her time at the Lisman school. With the



Submitted photo
"I am a lifetime honorary Choctaw County High School Cheerleader and I consider myself known as the # 1 fan and I up hold this responsibility with the utmost seriousness," says Joy Seybold, who among her many duties at CCHS has served as cheerleader sponsor. Seybold is January's Teacher of the Month.

Teacher of Month January 2007 Joy Seybold

push for integration getting into full swing, tensions ran high and the situation became increasingly volatile. But Seybold continued to teach, leaning on some newly-discovered mentors to help her along.

"Carrie Mae Johnson and Anthony Butler were my mentors then," she says. "If not for them, I don't know if I would have made it."

After a year at Lisman, Seybold opted out of the educational system for a short time, taking a job with the Department of Human Resources in Butler. It was, she says, a time of revelation that would change her perception of education.

"I did home visitations," she remembers. "I think it was the Lord's way of showing me where I was. It opened my eyes to the living conditions of some of the students who lived here. But I truly missed teaching."

Seybold re-entered

the classroom, this time at East Choctaw Junior High. Again, she found herself involved with helping children with problems that did not always include school-work.

"I taught Title I Reading with Sylvia Gibson," she says. "But I found that I was always being called upon to be more than a teacher. The kids would come to me with problems that, as a teacher, I couldn't really handle – deaths of family members, family problems – I tried to juggle it so that I could spend time helping them, but I also had to teach."

When the state began a program to draw teachers into counseling positions by offering them opportunities to obtain their degrees in that area, she jumped at it.

"I went to the University of West Alabama and got certified in counseling," she explains. "I started out as counselor at Butler Elementary."

Once again, her role included working with younger children. It was a position that she enjoyed, she says, and one that gave her many fond memories of her early years as a counselor. But she still longed to be in a high school setting.

"Mr. Underwood finally moved me to Choctaw County High School," she says. "I was there for 4 years the first time."

Although she left the school to take on a position with the school system's Career Tech programs for 3 years, she eventually found herself longing to go back at CCHS.

"I liked working with Career Tech," she says. "It was joining the real world with school. But I missed the daily contact with the kids, and I asked to come back."

"I finally got my teenagers!" she adds with a laugh.

Although she admits that her job is often difficult and time-consuming, she credits her husband for being supportive through the years.

"Dean has always been supportive," she says. "He's bought paint, painted classrooms, and he's even been there to help when a student and their family came to our house because they were having problems. He's always been there to help



Choctaw Sun photo by Dee Ann Campbell
Seybold is shown here with her senior Advanced Placement students, who are able to work with the program through a grant she helped to write. Pictured are Amanda Coleman, Jahmad Harrison, Daniel Dykes, Courtney Wallace, and Erin Bryan.

me."

Seybold adds that her son Darren, a 1993 CCHS graduate, was also very supportive.

"He made me more understanding of the parent/teacher relationship from the parent's perspective," she explains. "His love for sports has given me a special spot in my heart for student-athletes."

Among her many roles at CCHS, Seybold works with the students to ensure that they take the courses that they need, while trying to also accommodate the courses that they enjoy. It is, she says, sometimes a juggling act to do both, but it's worth the effort.

"I have to make sure they get what is required," she says, "But I also want them to be happy. I try to do that whenever possible."

Seybold also coordinates assessments and writes grants for special programs like the new ACCESS technology grant that CCHS obtained last year.

But her most vital role, she believes, is her work to help the students reach their potential and find their niche in life.

"There's that goal of graduation," she says. "It's my job to make it happen for them, to help them get there no matter what it takes."

But her role goes beyond ensuring that they make it to graduation. It involves instilling within them that drive to discover what they want to be in the future.

"I love to see these kids out there working at the bank or as a nurse in a hospital," she says. "Or to see them doing well in college."

"The most enjoyable part is working with the seniors," she adds. "They are saying, 'I'm graduating... What do I do

now?' I enjoy working with them through the whole process, whether they join the military or go to college or go to work, I want to see them succeed."

For some students, helping them reach their potential comes easy, she says. For others, it takes work.

"Sometimes you have to dig it out of them," she explains. "There's so much potential in there, but sometimes you have to let them see that being smart and doing well is the thing to do. It breaks my heart to see them not realize that."

Throughout her office is evidence of her work with the teenagers that she loves so much. It is evident in the award plaque from the Army National Guard that she dubbed her 'Super Counselor'. It is evident in the framed essay written by a student who simply wanted to 'walk in her shoes'.

But the icing on the cake, she says, is when she sees that her former students – those whom she has helped travel through their high schools years and on to bigger things – are fulfilling their potential in life.

"I think about students like Candice Ray who is at Texas A&M now," she says. "She's on the Dean's List, or when Clinton Graham grabbed me at a ball game the other night and said, 'I made the Dean's List!' Or students like Thomas Jackson and Sarah Dykes who went on to be so successful. That's what makes it worth it."

"The measure of success is what the students do when they leave here," she adds. "That's how we need to judge our system. We're shaping the future."

SCHS students begin Dual Enrollment at Ala. Southern

By Dee Ann Campbell
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GILBERTOWN – It's a jump-start on the future. For two students at Southern Choctaw High School, this semester marks a giant step toward their graduation, and a chance to get ahead in their quest for their college degrees.

Last week, SCHS seniors Megan Bonner and Samantha Johnson began attending night classes at Alabama Southern Community College. But their classes will not just earn them early college credit. Through the college's Dual Enrollment program, the students will be able to gain high school credit as well.

Both Samantha and Megan are now taking English Composition I through ASCC's night classes, where they attend class every Monday evening. The course takes the place of



Choctaw Sun photo by Marcus Gates
Megan Bonner and Samantha Johnson, left, began their Dual Enrollment courses on Monday evening. Also pictured in background is instructor Patricia Jones.

the senior English class they would have attended at the high school.

Although students in other schools in the county have already taken advantage of Dual Enrollment – in particular, Patrician Academy, where ASCC professor

Jimmy Cowan teaches a college-level American Government course on the high school campus – Megan and Samantha are the first to do so at SCHS.

But they don't intend to be the last.

"We're already told some people that they are

going to regret not doing it," says Samantha. "You get both credits, and it gives you an idea of what college is like."

"Some were thinking that one class won't make much difference when they get to college," adds Megan. "But it's one that

you won't have to take."

The only drawback, they say, is that the courses require tuition and book fees. But compared to the cost of such courses once they get to a university setting, the fees are minimal.

Both Megan and Samantha acknowledge that, although they've only attended one class so far, the course will undoubtedly be more difficult than the high school courses that they are familiar with. But one advantage, they say, is that their teacher at ASCC is one that they know well.

"Mrs. (Patricia) Jones is our teacher," Megan says. "We have her in high school already, so we know her."

In order to enter the Dual Enrollment Program through ASCC, students must meet certain requirements in order to get dual credit. Requirements include having at least a 'B' average in completed high school courses and earning a certain score on the ACT or the ASSET placement test. There must also be a contractual agreement between the school or school system and

Alabama Southern.

In addition to her English class, Megan is also attending ASCC's night class in Music Appreciation to earn an additional elective college credit before graduation.

"I have to have four electives for college," says Megan. "So I chose to go ahead and take music."

Next fall, Megan plans to attend the University of Mobile to pursue a career in nursing, and by the time she graduates, she will already have 2 college credits behind her. She also plans to earn a history credit during the summer term at ASCC.

Samantha's credit in English will give her one less course to take when she attends dental hygiene school this fall. Although she is still undecided about her choice of colleges, she says she may opt for Meridian Community College.

But no matter where she and Megan attend college or what they chose to pursue, the courses they are taking at night at ASCC in Gilbertown will give them a leg up toward their degrees.