

'I treat them like my own'

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

TOXEY – "I believe in treating my students like I would want my own child to be treated," says Karen Dahlberg of South Choctaw Academy.

Each year, she has a room filled with 5-year-olds – kids who come to her with different backgrounds, different family lives, and on different levels emotionally and academically. They offer a challenge to her – one that calls upon her to be their teacher, their mentor, their disciplinarian, and their mother-away-from-home.

It is a role that she has come to see as her calling, but one that she had not planned for her life.

When Karen graduated from high school, she already had her career plans in mind. She would earn her degree in Physical Education from Livingston University, and be certified to teach P.E. for kids from nursery through high school.

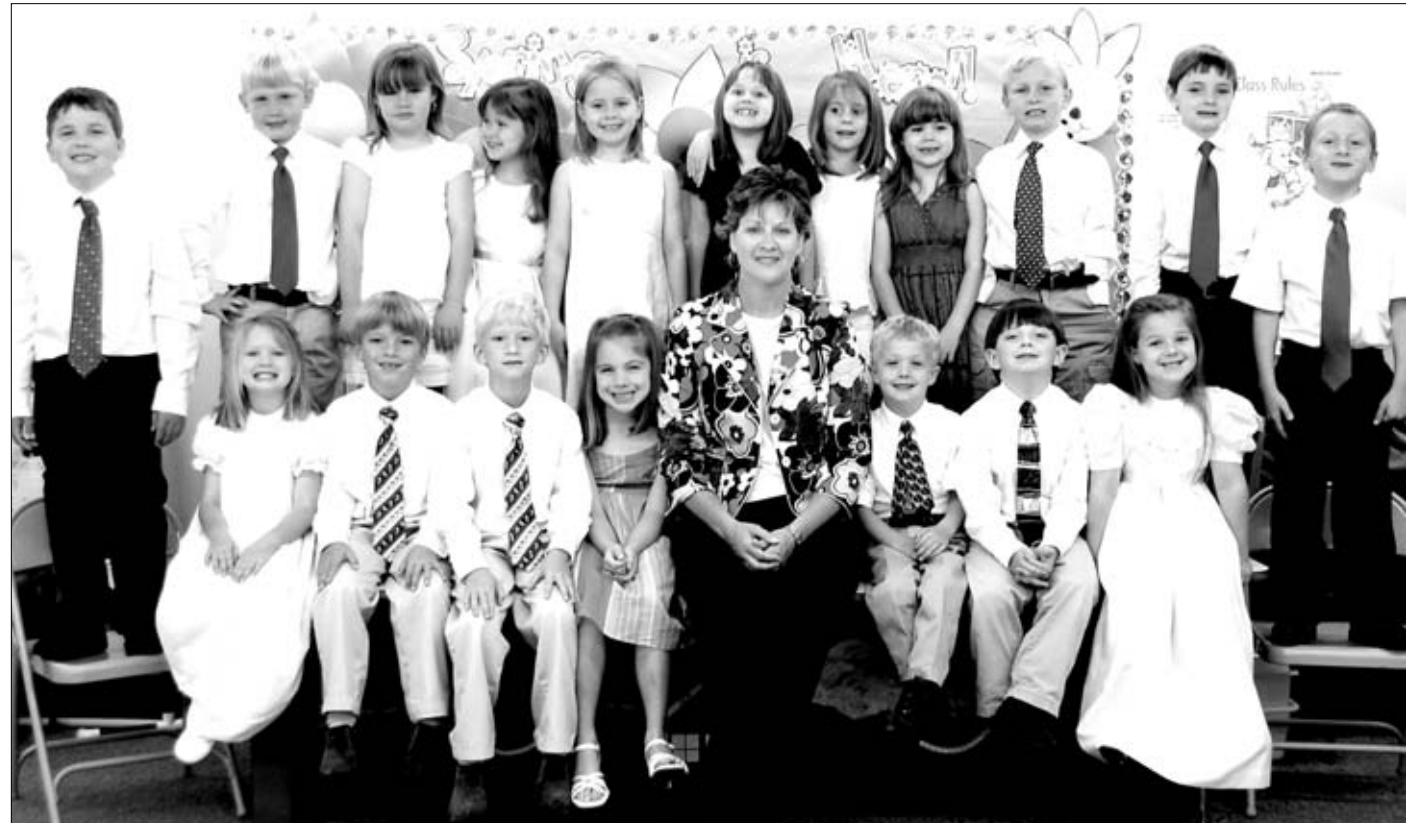
Teaching in a Kindergarten classroom was definitely not part of those plans.

"My major was in physical education," she explains. "I got my B.S. degree in that field, but I was staying home with my first child when an opening came available in Kindergarten at SCA."

Karen filled in as Kindergarten teacher for one semester. Although it was an experience that she had never planned and least expected, those few months working with 5-year-olds would give her a new goal for her teaching career.

"The very next semester, I enrolled in Early Childhood Education classes at Livingston," she says.

Karen earned her second B.S. degree, put aside her desire to teach P.E., and embarked on what would become her long-term role at SCA.



Choctaw Sun photo by Dee Ann Campbell
South Choctaw Academy Kindergarten teacher Karen Dahlberg sits among the 18 students in this year's class. A 19-year member of the SCA faculty, she is married to Bruce Dahlberg and the couple have two children, Rob and Kate.

Over the next 19 years, she would become one of the school's most valued faculty members, with parents often praising her work with their young children. Her presence at the school would become an asset that would bring in new families who wanted their children to begin their school years under her tutelage.

For Karen, the past 2 decades have been an opportunity for her to give young children a good start in their education. Her work has allowed her the unique chance to instill in them the early skills necessary to succeed in school.

Although she admits that many teachers are not eager to teach 5-year-olds because of the degree of 'mothering' that comes with the role, Karen says that her job offers rewards that only come from teaching Kindergarten.

Teacher of the Month April 2007 Karen Dahlberg

"I just had that calling for this age group," she explains. "At this age, you see so much progress. You get to watch them change and grow, and they learn so much during that year."

Of course, she adds, her job is not just about teaching her students to read. It is helping them physically, emotionally, and academically – and adding a little bit of that 'mothering' as well.

"I have daddies who bring their little girls to school and say, 'Can you put her hair up?'" she

says with a smile. "It involves Band-aides® and shoe-tying, buckling pants ... all of that is part of it."

Looking back at her own school years, Karen remembers one particular teacher who made an impact on her life – a teacher who gave her some much-needed self-esteem at a time when she needed it.

"Mrs. Doris Holmes taught me English in elementary school," she recalls. "I loved it because of her. She took me under her wing, let me grade

papers – I wanted to please her. She made me feel special."

As a teacher of the youngest students, Karen has tried to instill that same feeling in the Kindergarteners who come into her classroom.

"You have to pet them a little," she says. "Kindergarten is a transition time for them. If they attend K4, that helps. But for those who don't, they especially need some attention to help them in the beginning. It takes time, but after Christmas, you can really see them blossom."

Because students come to Kindergarten at a various levels, from those who are reading to those who are still learning their letters, Karen urges much parental involvement in her classroom. It is that parental involvement, she says, that is key to giving them a good beginning to help to succeed in school.

"I've gotten to be at every event, see them do everything they've done here," she explains. "I wouldn't take anything for being able to be here for my children."

"Children today are expected to know so much more when they get to Kindergarten, mainly because of K4," she says. "It's important for parents to be involved, especially if their child does not go to K4 classes. I tell my parents all the time that if they will build that early foundation, not let them get behind in the beginning, they will do well."

Having taught at the same school for the length of her career, Karen says that she sees rewards for her work in the successes of the students who have come through her classroom. And, she adds, some of her most treasured moments are those times when former students come back to visit her.

"I have had older students who still come back and give me Christmas presents," she says. "It means a lot to me that they still feel like I'm their teacher."

Her own two children – Rob who graduated in 2004 and Kate who is a senior this year – have also been part of her class at SCA in the past. Although she admits that teaching them presented its own set of unique challenges, their presence at the same school where she teaches has been a tremendous blessing in her life.

"I've gotten to be at every event, see them do everything they've done here," she explains. "I wouldn't take anything for being able to be here for my children."

And, she says, she tries to be there for the Kindergarteners whom she treats just like her own.

"Seeing the progress they make ... that's why I do it," Karen says. "It's seeing them grow physically, emotionally, and in every aspect. I just look at them like that's my child, and that keeps you going the extra mile."



Ready to take the stage

Submitted photo

Pictured are cast members for the upcoming drama 'Dress Rehearsal for Murder' at Southern Choctaw High.

SCHS to present drama 'Dress Rehearsal for Murder'

By Clint Lee
SCHS reporter

GILBERTOWN – The newly formed Drama Club at Southern Choctaw High School is currently planning for the performance of a play to be held April 26-27.

Edith Weiss authored the play, "Dress Rehearsal for Murder", a mystery set in a bed and breakfast named the Bide-A-Wee Bed and

Breakfast Inn on a remote British isle.

The cast includes Nathalia Chrispim as Mrs. Peabody; Jennifer Carlisle as Mrs. White; Clint Lee as Dr. Pilz; Amber Rankins as Riviera Fitz-Charlton; Bonnie Morgan as Minnie; Morgan Presley as Mrs. Greer; Thirloy McGrew as Mr. Butler; Brittany Turner as Bettye; Alan Reed as Lenny; Mary Kathryn

Doggette as Agnes Cook; Brittany Miller as Miss Wallaby; Andi Clanahan as Miss Willingford; Crystal Allen as Colonel Muthart; Hope Ratcliffe as Moxie; Greg Turner as Ronald Fitz-Charlton; Andrew Sikes as Inspector Barish; and Carlo Freda as Bernard.

Mrs. Patricia Jones, a faculty member of the English Department and sponsor of the Senior Beta Club is the co-

sponsor and director of the SCHS Drama Club. Mrs. Patti Kirk, the Mathematics Department Chair and Cheerleader sponsor is also a co-sponsor and stage manager.

Others involved with the play include Sawyer Jones, Special Effects Coordinator; Brandon Kelly and Chris Smith, Special Effects and Lights Managers.

Garry Demetrius Skelton Scholarship to be awarded to student at NADC

ROCK SPRINGS – A scholarship fund has been set up for students planning to attend the Nashville Auto Diesel College in Nashville, TN, in memory of a local man who was an honor graduate from the school.

In memory of Garry Demetrius Skelton, who graduated from NADC in June of 2004, a scholarship will be granted to a current or new student who will be attending NADC this fall. A 1998 graduate of South Choctaw Academy and the son of Garry and Patricia Skelton of the Rock Springs community, Demetrius was an honor student at NADC, served as first student council president at the college, and went on to attend the Mercedes Benz Elite school in Orlando, Florida after graduating from NADC. Demetrius also served for 5 1/2 years in the United States Air Force.

In order to apply for the Garry Demetrius Skelton Memorial Scholarship, students must submit an essay of at least 500 words containing information about themselves, their future goals, and their reason



Garry Demetrius Skelton

for needing the scholarship. Students must have a grade point average of at least 3.0, and must show a determination to succeed.

Applications for the scholarship will be accepted until June 8, 2007 and must be mailed to Scholarship, 1050 Pine View Road, Butler, AL 36904. In order to email the application, students may contact Patricia at 601-693-6343.

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