

2013-14 school year brings in 9 new teachers

Written by Becca Brandt and Darci Tomky

Nine new teachers gathered Tuesday, Aug. 6 for their first day in the Holyoke School District. The bunch is eager to get the school year rolling.

Four new teachers have been hired at the elementary school including Tressa Amann, kindergarten; Cynthia Bahler, kindergarten; Kortney Firme, second grade; and Nancy Miles, special education.

Five positions have been filled at Holyoke JR/SR High including Havilah Andersen, life science; Clay Christensen, agriculture education; Abby Einspahr, math; Chuck Hurst, business; and Josh Rahe, language arts.

Students will fill the schools Thursday, Aug. 15 for the first day of the 2013-14 year.



Holyoke School District welcomed nine new teachers for their first day, Tuesday, Aug. 6. Pictured from left are, front row, Tressa Amann, Cynthia Bahler, Abby Einspahr and Kortney Firme; and back row, Chuck Hurst, Clay Christensen, Nancy Miles, Josh Rahe and Havilah Andersen.

—Enterprise photo

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Tressa Amann

A new face to the Holyoke community, Tressa Amann has been hired as one of the new kindergarten teachers at Holyoke Elementary School. She will be starting her first year of teaching.

Amann graduated with honors in June with a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education from Colorado Christian University after only three years of schooling. She was named the Outstanding Student of the Year for 2012-13 by her professors and staff members at CCU.

Although this is Amann's first time as the head of a classroom, she is no stranger to working with kids. She has 14 years of experience working in preschools in Colorado.

Her work has taken her to places all over the state, including Highlands Ranch and Castle Rock, but she is loving the small town feel of Holyoke.

Growing up in Pagosa Springs, Amann has experienced living in a small town before, but her family is still adjusting to this new setting. Things like stores closing earlier on Sundays will definitely take some getting used to, said Amann.

Amann has high hopes about the success of the upcoming year and wants to do her part to make every student succeed. "I want the kids to know that they can be successful," said Amann. "They can be anything they want to be."

Outside of school, Amann loves running, quilting and doing crafty projects, but her favorite thing is spending time with her four kids, Madison 16, Molly 11, Mason 10 and Megann 7.

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Havilah Andersen

Bringing excitement for learning and teaching to the JR/SR High is Havilah Andersen, the new life science teacher.

Her excitement for the position is evident. "This job is all the things I love," she said, noting she wants to get the kids interested and engaged in science by presenting the material in a way they can relate to.

Everyone at the school is great so far, Andersen said, and she looks forward to getting to know the students.

Working with kids has always been a positive experience for Andersen, who has spent extensive time as a youth Sunday school teacher with the Mormon church in Sterling. She worked as a personal trainer for the last four years at Outback Fitness in Haxtun but looks forward to pursuing a career in education.

Andersen will be getting her teaching certificate after taking an exam this year.

She grew up in New York state, graduating high school in 1992. She earned a bachelor's degree in athletic training in 1998 from Brigham Young University in Utah.

Andersen has spent the last 16 years in Haxtun, where her husband Jared works for Servi-Tech. They have five children, Taylor 17, Caleb 15, McKenna 13, Isaac 9 and Corbin 5. Andersen's free time is spent exercising, reading and spending time with her family.

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Cynthia Bahler

Cynthia Bahler joins the Holyoke Elementary staff as a new kindergarten teacher. With her previous experience working in first-grade and behavior impaired classrooms, she is excited to be teaching in a school that is on the upper-end of the progressive movement of providing for students' needs.

Bahler attended Kearney High School where she graduated in 1989. She then moved on to the University of Nebraska at Kearney and the University of Wyoming 1989-1994.

Earning a degree in elementary education and special education was not Bahler's original plan. She started school with the intent of getting a degree in photography until she realized all the things she enjoyed doing centered around kids.

This year marks Bahler's 20th year teaching and she is so glad she is spending it working with kids in her own classroom.

Her teaching career began in 1994 in Oshkosh, Neb. where she taught first grade. The following year she taught first grade at Wauneta-Palisade Schools.

Bahler's career took a turn in 2000 when she became a behavior-impaired classroom teacher with Educational Service Unit #15.

As a teacher, she was in charge of a class made up of special-needs students from 18 different schools ranging from Pre-K to 21 years of age.

Using the skills she learned in the classroom, Bahler became a traveling behavior consultant, educating other teachers about academic and behavioral tactics that improved students' learning.

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In 2007, Bahler was recruited as a language pathologist and language resource teacher and began working full-time in 2009 to serve Dundy County, Hayes Center, Wauneta-Palisade and Chase County schools.

Bahler is looking forward to the hugs and humor of her students and their “a-ha” moments when they realize they can write their names or tie their shoes. She wants to be a teacher that leads them down a path with an enthusiasm for learning.

Living in Lamar, Neb. with her husband Wayne and sons, Trey 14 and Hayden 11, Bahler will be commuting to Holyoke.

In her free time, Bahler enjoys socializing, riding horses, attending her kids’ functions and volunteering.

Clay Christensen

Clay Christensen is getting settled in at Holyoke JR/SR High as the new agriculture education instructor and FFA advisor.

Earning his FFA American degree, Christensen was active in FFA throughout high school in Wright, Wyo., where he graduated in 2008.

He recently earned a Bachelor of Science with two majors, agriculture education and agriculture business, from the University of Wyoming in May 2013. There he competed on the livestock judging team in 2011-12 and was the president of the ag education organization Alpha Tau

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Alpha.

The small school setting of Holyoke appealed to Christensen for his first teaching job. So far he's liked it in Holyoke and likes how he'll be able to walk down the street and know everybody.

One of his goals is to have his students career ready by preparing them with resumes, cover letters and interviews.

As far as FFA goes, he wants to keep last year's forward momentum going and keep getting the program organized. He said he wants to bring the ag program back to a community program with things like service projects that will get the students interacting with the community.

Christensen is an outdoor kind of guy who likes hunting, fishing and golfing, and he hopes to begin raising show hogs. He's also set to serve as the head junior high football coach.

Abby Einspahr

A 2002 HHS graduate, Abby Einspahr is again walking the halls of the JR/SR High, this time as a math teacher for grades 7-9.

While Einspahr was back in northeast Colorado teaching junior high history in Yuma last year, she's looking forward to teaching math this year and being closer to family. Her parents Allen and Amy Einspahr, brother Adam Einspahr and sister Amber Sprague and their families all live in Holyoke.

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She taught in California for three years at Grace Lutheran School in Modesto and another three years at Calvary Lutheran School in San Lorenzo. She gained experience in a wide range of middle school subjects including math, language arts, literature, spelling, art, religion, P.E., keyboarding and health.

With such a crazy schedule at those schools, Einspahr is simply excited to be able to teach math all day long.

Middle level math along with P.E./health were her emphasis areas at Concordia University in Seward, Neb., where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in education in 2006.

Einspahr said in some ways Holyoke has changed a lot in the past decade, with lots of new things coming to town. She's a big fan of the Denver Broncos and likes hanging out with friends and trying new things.

Kortney Firme

Excited to bring her teaching experience to Holyoke, Kortney Firme joins the Holyoke Elementary staff as a new second-grade teacher.

In prior years, Firme has taught first grade in Gretna, Neb. and Virginia Beach, Va. for a total of six years. She noted the different maturity level she will see from the second-grade students and can't wait to see how their personalities will be brought out this coming school year.

Firme attended high school in Columbus, Neb., graduating in 1998. She moved on to Central Community College in Columbus 1998-2001 to study early childhood education before attending Wayne State College in Wayne, Neb. In 2004, she earned a bachelor's degree in

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elementary education with an emphasis in early childhood education.

This year, Firme is looking forward to working with the kids and her colleagues to make a difference in her students' lives.

She is very impressed with the school's sense of community and pride. It seems people are proud to say they are from Holyoke, Firme said.

This could lead to some disagreements in her household, she added jokingly, as her husband, Jeff, is a huge Haxtun Bulldogs fan.

The Firme family moved to Haxtun in March 2012 following Jeff's retirement from the military. Firme spends her free time with her children, Lily 3 and Max 18 months, taking walks, playing in the park, picking up sticks and doing whatever else toddlers find amusing.

Chuck Hurst

With a wealth of business knowledge, Chuck Hurst is excited to be at Holyoke JR/SR High as the business teacher and FBLA advisor.

Hurst has gained 40 years of business experience after earning a bachelor's degree in business from the University of Arizona in Tucson, Ariz., in 1971. "I've done everything in the business world," said Hurst, noting his wide range of experiences will make him a huge asset to the Holyoke business classroom. "I'm looking forward to sharing my experience," he said.

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Hurst had been on Colorado's Western Slope before relocating last year when he served as the business teacher at Revere. He lives with his wife Diane in Julesburg. Hurst has two sons, Ruben in Pennsylvania and Kevin in Ohio, and a stepdaughter, Tori in Wyoming. He has one grandchild and another on the way.

"It's been a good experience so far," said Hurst, noting it's flat and windy out on the plains of northeast Colorado compared to the mountains, but the people are very friendly. When he's not in the classroom, Hurst likes to camp, travel and bowl.

Nancy Miles

Although this will be Nancy Miles's first year as a special education teacher for Holyoke schools, she is very familiar with the local education system.

A 1990 Holyoke High School graduate, Miles went to college with the intent of pursuing a broadcasting career. She earned a bachelor's degree in communications from Metropolitan State University of Denver in 1994.

Miles spent most of her time after she completed her schooling being a stay-at-home mom for her two boys, Nathan 16 and Dylan 12. It wasn't until she moved back to Holyoke that she became interested in working with Northeast BOCES.

From 2009-2012 Miles worked as a one-on-one paraprofessional with high needs students at the Dragon's Wagon Preschool. During the 2012-13 school year, Miles became a full-time paraprofessional at Holyoke Elementary school.

Miles attributes part of her decision to become a special education teacher to the dedication that

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her husband, superintendent Bret Miles, has to the education of Holyoke students.

She is excited to be back in the classroom and working with each of the kids. “To see growth is always exciting,” Miles said. “It’s not always easy, but it’s always rewarding.”

One way Miles wants to teach the students this year is with technology like iPads. It helps the students engage, because they are learning while having fun, she noted.

Most of Miles’s free time is dedicated to attending her children’s sporting events. If she happens to find a spare moment, she also likes to go camping.

Josh Rahe

“It feels good to be back,” said Josh Rahe, a Holyoke native who will be filling the grades 7-12 language arts position.

He said Holyoke has a strong school and a strong community. He’s excited for the new opportunities at the JR/SR High and looks forward to getting to know his colleagues and students.

Rahe is a familiar face at HHS. The 1994 HHS graduate student taught in Holyoke as well as taught here in the English department for the 2003-04 school year.

This will be his 14th year of teaching after earning his Bachelor of Arts degree from Metro State in Denver in 2000, with a major in English at the secondary level and a minor in general

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business.

He has had experience in grades 6-12 in English, social studies and P.E. at Byers, Calhan and Strasburg, in addition to coaching experience in football, basketball and baseball.

Rahe is familiar with a small school setting, and while he understands the Holyoke community, he brings a different perspective to the school, not to mention a good sense of humor.

He's glad to be closer to family, including parents Pastor Gary and Diane Rahe and brother Ben Rahe and his family. Rahe enjoys hanging out with family and friends, watching movies, playing golf and sports.

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