

## Forever Relationships



“You can’t put a price on the people you work with.”

That’s one of the first things Patti McKenzie, 1st grade teacher extraordinaire, says when reflecting on her 17 years at Aristoi. When asked about her one favorite memory, she can’t do just one. Many come, fast and furiously. She ticks off the names of her colleagues with loving adjectives and a brilliant smile, “There’s Angela Beane. I love her. Brenda Davidson. Amazing. Ruth Anne Kormash. The DeJongs. We have a great relationship with them.” She continues, “The amazing teachers and the relationships that I’ve developed with those teachers. It goes on and on and on. So many of them I’ve known for years. Terry and Lauren Boling. They taught my daughter Kristin. She’s now 34. So, many of us have these long relationships.”

Relationships. That’s what first brought McKenzie to Aristoi. She experienced the ISDs, the big ISDs. That was not her style, not what McKenzie wanted. She wanted small. Relationship.

“I was teaching at a small, private school, and some of those students left and went to Aristoi, so I came here. After the first year, I fell in love with the school. Actually, it was the people that kept me here. Mrs. Beane kept me here. Brenda Davidson came a month later.”

Aristoi was originally known as the West Houston Charter School, focused on fine arts, and not classical education. That came later. Says McKenzie, “It took a little while for classical to come in. I love classical education. I would promote that anywhere. The history that we teach in classical education is so in-depth. It’s wonderful. Especially in first grade. We are about to start ancient Egypt. We have already covered the pilgrims coming over, the Revolutionary War, the Westward Expansion, Lewis and Clark. There is a lot in our history curriculum that I have learned that I was not taught in my own education. I am a history nerd, so I love all of this stuff.”

And, the families. That’s what McKenzie loves, too. “We just went on our first field trip in two years. I got to talk to the families again while we were at Blessington Farms. We have the greatest families. We are so blessed. The families realize that, too, after they’ve been here for a year or two. They see what we do and they see the curriculum. They see what we put into it. They get on board with us.”

When asked about the dedication, passion, and hard work of Aristoi’s teachers, McKenzie doesn’t mince words, “You know, it’s a choice. I worked in banking and management. I always came back to teaching. When my son went off to college, that’s when I went off to college, to LeTourneau. That’s when I got my teaching degree. I’m doing exactly what I’ve always wanted to do, from the time I was a little girl.”

**A message to parents**

McKenzie wants parents to take this advice to heart, "One of the main things, and this doesn't have a lot to do with education, tell the parent to take time with your families, spend time with them. Take kids off the phones or electronics. I look back, we were busy with our kids every single day, from sports to church, to other extracurriculars. We did all the after-school activities with them. Whatever it was, we did it. We were with them and spent time. Keep them busy. Children need to exercise their bodies, not so much their fingers."

**About Aristoi's PTO**

"PTO is always so great to us. They bring us lunch and bring us coffee. Teacher Appreciation Week is coming up and I know they are going to go all out. I know, because they always do. PTO takes care of its teachers because of the hard work put into the classroom and into the students. They are just amazing. We are spoiled."

**As for the future**

McKenzie explains with a broad smile, "When I retire, my future will not be severed from Aristoi. We will keep going with this relationship. We will not stop. We live right across the street from the Upper School. It is going to keep going. I might retire, but it's not a "goodbye". It is "til I see you next time when I come on campus."