

New Brady teachers ready for year's challenges

Written by Deb Egenberger
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SANDY BURKE

T.J. NIELSEN

One veteran, one in first year join staff.

Two Brady teachers share the role of new kid on the block for the 2010-11 school year.

But as Sandy Burke and T.J. Nielsen greet Brady Public Schools students this fall, they'll face a vastly different set of challenges.

Burke is a veteran business teacher of 17 years, coming back to her hometown from just down the road at Maxwell.

Nielsen is stepping into his first teaching assignment and takes on activities director duties as well.

They join incoming principal Bruce Hird, who will be featured in The Times next week, as new certified staff members.

Sandy Burke

After a tumultuous period when illness threatened Sandy Burke's life, the 1983 Brady High School graduate is thankful to be back in the classroom again.

"I'm excited to be back in my hometown, I'm excited to be teaching in the school I graduated from and I'm excited to be going back to school," Burke said of her move from Maxwell to Brady this year.

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Burke spent 17 years building a program and teaching innovative business classes in Maxwell. Now she hopes to form a true business department in Brady as well.

“There was only one true business class offered here,” she said. “There’s a lot of information technology and advanced computers for a school this size but not a true business department.”

Burke will work on that, beginning with a new entrepreneurial class known as REAL—Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning.

She said the class includes a curriculum designed for learning about business in a rural setting.

“There are no books,” she said. “It’s a real out-of-the-box kind of class.”

In addition, Burke will teach keyboarding and careers for all students in seventh and eighth grades as well as accounting.

In addition to teaching business half time, Burke will also serve as the guidance counselor for 7-12 students.

“After 17 years of teaching, I think the counseling part of this will be easy,” she said.

Learning the rules and expectations of the rest of the job will come through on-the-job training and work toward a second master’s degree.

After graduating from Brady, Burke attended Mid-Plains Community college where she played volleyball for two years.

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She earned her bachelor's degree in education from Kearney State College in 1989 and later her master's in education from Graceland University. Burke is currently working on another master's degree in guidance counseling done mostly online from Chadron State College.

Burke and her husband Brad have three children: Keifer, 20, and twins Sawyer and Maggie, 16.

T.J. Nielsen

Growing up in the tiny town of Emerson, IA, T.J. Nielsen always knew he wasn't cut out for city life.

That's why the 25-year-old Peru State College graduate thinks Brady will be a perfect fit for his first teaching job.

Nielsen participated in football, basketball, track and baseball as a high school student. He said he has known forever that athletics and recreation would always be a part of his life.

Nielsen will get to pass on his knowledge of fitness, health and unconventional sports as the K-12 physical education teacher in Brady.

"We're going to do some oddball activities," Nielsen said, "like play disc golf."

Nielsen hopes to introduce Brady students to activities they don't see every day to broaden their fitness base.

He said he also hopes to encourage more kids to stay active, hopefully by finding something

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everyone enjoys doing.

In addition to teaching P.E., Nielsen has taken on the activities director duties as well as managing the concession stand.

He said learning the intricacies of how the school's activity calendar is set up, the budget and where everything is has taken him nearly a month but he's ready for school to start.

Nielsen is a 2009 graduate of PSC with a degree in physical education. He is currently working through an accelerated program to earn his master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Doane College.

Extra-duty assignments include an assistant football coaching position as well as junior high football and girls basketball.

"I hope to help develop strong athletic programs that focus on sportsmanship and teach kids how to compete in the game of life," he said.

In his spare time, Nielsen said he practices what he preaches by always being active. He enjoys golfing, fishing, working out and watching all kinds of college sports.