

"I can't express enough how truly fortunate we are here at Fawn Elementary to have such an incredible talent as Mr. Zeiler. Michael has a unique and magical combination of talent, enthusiasm and a true gift for teaching young children to love music."

PRINCIPAL KATHLEEN SHIREY



NULPH FAMILY PHOTO

In the summers, Zeiler is an employee at Disney World in Orlando Fla., serving as a bell hop cast member at the Hollywood Tower of Terror attraction. Josh Nulph, 10 in photo, visited in summer 2008.

ZEILER · FROM F1

"My favorite part is embellishing the role as a creepy, deranged bell hop," he says.

A highlight for him is when his students and their families visit while they are on vacation.

"It is really fun for the kids to have their pictures taken with their music teacher dressed as a deranged bell hop and then have me escort them into the attraction," he says. He also tries to be a bit of a tour guide to the families and make sure they experience as much as possible.

Celebrity sightings come with the job. Michael J. Fox, Weird Al Yankovic, Paris Hilton and "High School Musical" star Corbin Bleu are among those he can immediately recall.

"The funny thing is you don't see them as celebrities, with a big name tag on them, or surrounded by a huge entourage," Zeiler says. "They are just another normal guest and that is the way they want to be treated."

Zeiler enjoys what he calls the "Disney Magic."

"Nowhere else really creates that special feeling of being a kid again," he says. "Being a part of many shows and attractions is a mesmerizing experience."

He has the opportunity to meet and interact with people from throughout the world and learn about diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, he says.

"When you entertain someone, you connect with them in a way that transcends language and cultural barriers." His students love that connection.

"Whether it's a movie they've seen or a past family vacation, they love talking with me and sharing experiences about Disney," he says.

He has learned that there are some similar skills and character traits needed to work effectively as a teacher and Disney cast member, including good communication abilities, and making his charges a priority.

"Working at Walt Disney World has helped me to spark creativity in my students and in the choral productions," he says. He tries to learn as much as possible while at Disney about organizational and production techniques that he can bring back to Highlands to implement.

RISING STAR



"I was raised to believe that it is each individual's responsibility to make their community a better place, and this is my way of doing it," teacher Mike Zeiler said.

ERIC FELACK | VALLEY NEWS DISPATCH

His first spring concert was a Disney-themed show in which his students took on the roles of each character for which they auditioned. "It was great to see such involvement and talent at such a young age," he says.

His efforts have not gone unnoticed. "I can't express enough how truly fortunate we are here at Fawn Elementary to have such an incredible talent as Mr. Zeiler," says his principal Kathleen Shirey. "Michael has a unique and magical combination of talent, enthusiasm and a true gift for teaching young children to love music."

His outgoing personality and constant optimism is what draws students to him and want to do their very best for him, she adds.

"He truly is an extraordinary teacher who gives his best every day."

Gene Nicastro, his principal at Heights Elementary, calls his passion for music contagious.

"As a result, our students are excited about singing and performing for others," he says. "Students now realize that music can be enjoyed and experienced in all aspects of life, both inside and outside of school."

Zeiler says that his students encouraged him to take on yet another role — as a disc jockey. He began dances at the schools as elementary fundraisers and they have blossomed into well-attended

family events.

"I really enjoy having an evening of fun for the whole family," he says. "The students enjoy dancing with their parents and everyone has a great time."

Many families have asked him to DJ functions for them because they had so much fun at the elementary dances, and the idea grew into his current business as a professional disc jockey, performing under the name, DJ Mr. Z.

He plays community festivals, class reunions, graduation and holiday parties and more. "It's pretty cool having three different jobs, all of which help me spread the joy and importance of music to everyone," he says.

Zeiler considers it an honor and a privilege to be a Highlands alumnus and to teach in the Highlands School District.

"It is very rewarding to work as fellow colleague with many of the same teachers that had such a positive impact on me when I was a Highland student," he says. "I had very strong and dedicated teachers who taught me. I wanted to be just like them."

Being able to be a positive role model and inspire a love of learning to the next generation is a gift not only to the child, he says, but to the community.

"I was raised to believe that it is each individual's responsibility to make their community a better place, and this is my way of doing it."