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A Fabulous Introduction To Susan B. English

Photos and Article by Chelsea Suydam

Though summer seemed to have just started, it's that time of the year again, and kids are already beginning to adapt to a different schedule and the new changes at school. A few advantages this year at Susan B. English: wireless internet, more relaxed rules (e.g. wearing hats is now the teachers' discretion), and fresh faces.

I've taken the liberty of using this first back-to-school article to introduce you to both the teachers that have recently moved here and the other teachers that have been here for a number of years.

Susan B. English's newest teacher, Sam Giroux, is teaching 5th/6th grade classes and high school World History. Two teachers that you may not be familiar with, as they just began teaching in Seldovia last year, are Ruth Sensenig and Robyn Zinszer. Ruth Sensenig teaches high school Language Arts and three classes for the 7th/8th graders while also co-teaching 5th/6th reading. Robyn Zinszer, another co-teacher of 5th/6th grade reading and a teacher of 5th/6th grade "Specials," is our Special Education teacher.

We also have some teachers who have lived here a bit longer than two years. Among these is Tim Winters, who will be on his 6th year at SBE, teaching high school and junior high math and science along with high school digital photography. Paul Chissus is also up at the school's shop again, utilizing his knowledge to teach wood-working skills to the high school and other technology-related matters to the 5/6th and 7/8th graders. The last, but certainly not least, teacher is Karen Bornheimer, SBE's longest-residing teacher. She teaches the K-4th grade class, along with math for the 5th graders. And, finally, we have Sherry Hingley, who started out as a teacher but soon became our principal; this year she is also the principal of Port Graham's school.

I asked each teacher the same six questions, of which they all graciously answered, and here is a rundown of their responses:



Sam Giroux

5th & 6th Grade

High School World History

Where did you live before you moved to Seldovia?

Mr. Giroux: Hyder, Alaska

Ms. Sensenig: Soldotna, Alaska, where she completed her student teaching

Ms. Zinszer: Fairbanks, Alaska

Mr. Winters: Geneseo, New York

Mr. Chissus: Fairbanks, Alaska

Mrs. Bornheimer: Homer, Alaska, where she "still kind of lives," returning there every weekend

Mrs. Hingley: Troy, Montana



Ruth Sensenig

7th & 8th Grade

High School Language Arts

5th & 6th Grade Reading

What made you decide to come teach in Seldovia?

Mr. Giroux: Wanted to check out Southcentral Alaska after having lived in Southeast Alaska, and found a job at SBE.

Ms. Sensenig: Had always loved Seldovia and was fascinated by a beautiful, small town that was uniquely remote but still accessible to larger towns.

Ms. Zinszer: Had family in Homer, and knew she could teach dance and also try out teaching special ed in Seldovia.

Mr. Winters: Was moving to Alaska with his wife to get teaching jobs and found opportunities for both of them in Seldovia, ending up doing their interviews over the phone on the Mississippi River.

Mr. Chissus: Loves teaching shop, and SBE offered a job in this position.

Mrs. Bornheimer: Was brought to Seldovia by a job opening.

Mrs. Hingley: Wanted something different, and liked small communities and education.



Robyn Zinszer

5th & 6th Grade Special Education

5th & 6th Grade Reading

What kinds of things do you like to do when not teaching at Susan B. English?

Mr. Giroux: Kayaking, fishing, skiing, and engaging in other outdoor activities

Ms. Sensenig: Traveling, reading, taking care of her new home

Ms. Zinszer: Yoga, painting, cooking, reading, camping, and other outdoor activities ("but nothing crazy!")

Mr. Winters: Fishing, watching football, hiking and snowshoeing, swimming, and spending time with his wife and three children.

Mr. Chissus: Boating, fishing, spending time with family, and being in the outdoors

Mrs. Bornheimer: Reading, quilting, learning "new things about learning"

Mrs. Hingley: Sight-seeing, gardening, painting, reading, sewing, communicating with her five kids



Tim Winters

Jr High & High School Math and Science

High School Photography

Do you have hopes of benefiting the community in ways other than teaching?

Mr. Giroux: Was part of EMS and the fire department at other communities, so those are certainly options for him here.

Ms. Sensenig: Wants to get involved in the community in some way; one way being getting to know people not associated with the school.

Ms. Zinszer: Hopes to add to Seldovia opportunities by sharing her own talent – getting into the Seldovia Arts Council and continuing to teach yoga.

Mr. Winters: Life guards and coaches track when there's a need.

Mr. Chissus: Is doing a "community connections" unit with the 5th-6th grade class to "beautify" parts of Seldovia where it's needed.

Mrs. Bornheimer: Places teaching as her top priority – if you glance at the school parking lot, her little green car is bound to be there!

Mrs. Hingley: Believes it important to be involved in community, especially one with lots of potential like Seldovia that visitors are thrilled with, which she noticed in working at Herring Bay Mercantile.



Paul Chissus

Wood shop and Technology to 5th-12th Grades

If your students could only learn one thing from you this year, what would you want that to be?

Mr. Giroux: The importance of continuing to learn outside of school

Ms. Sensenig: How to "help themselves" learn what they need and want to

Ms. Zinszer: To "be your best you!"

Mr. Winters: To hold a good work ethic

Mr. Chissus: The value of having a good attitude

Mrs. Bornheimer: To enjoy learning

Mrs. Hingley: How important education is to one's future, as education is the key to success



Karen Bornheimer

Kindergarten - 4th Grade

Do you hold any visions of what you want SBE or Seldovia to look like in the future?

Mr. Giroux: Would like to "get to know the place first" before thinking of what it should look like.

Ms. Sensenig: Finds that though we are already doing great with lots going for us, it is easy to "get in a groove." Believes we need to try to push and challenge ourselves to do even better.

Ms. Zinszer: Sees that Seldovia can be on the cutting edge of education, with more vocational and art classes, as we have the facilities and teachers. Holds the idea of making our school, with its resources and staff, something all other small schools look up to – a leader of sorts.

Mr. Winters: Thinks it would be nice to see 100 kids in school, along with more job opportunities and a substantial form of industry.

Mr. Chissus: Wants to see a thriving community that is a desirable and probable place for youth to return to.

Mrs. Bornheimer: Would like to see a place where students enjoy coming to school, and when they leave, they don't feel limited as to what college they go to or what city they live in.

Mrs. Hingley: Would like to see more kids at SBE, though she did try to recruit more students because she knows Seldovia has lots of potential and opportunity.



Sherry Hingley

Principal for SBE and also Port Graham

I hope you now have a better acquaintance with all of our teachers and our principal at Susan B. English. Thank you very much to the teachers/principal for taking their time to answer these questions!

Chelsea