



Meet the Mentors

**Dick and Sandy Whelan • Melissa Jones
Elementary and Baldwin Middle School
By Danielle Howard**

After dedicating their lives to children, mentoring was a natural choice for the Whelans. Sandy retired three years ago from teaching kindergarten at The Foote School

in New Haven and Dick just retired last October from Branford-North Branford Pediatrics, after thirty-nine years as a practicing pediatrician. The couple mentor separately, he has a fourth grader at Melissa Jones and she has a fifth grader at Baldwin, but they present a united front on the importance of mentoring and the impact that it has on a child.

Although they both grew up in Hamden, they didn't meet until they worked at Yale-New Haven Hospital; she as a pediatric nurse and he as a pediatric intern. Sparks flew, and as we sipped coffee, they laughed and said that the story ended there as far as romantic details were concerned. They were married in 1972. The following year Dick began his two year service in the Navy as a pediatrician in Pensacola Florida. Upon their return, they bought a house in Guilford and Dick worked at the Hill Health Center in New Haven. In 1978, Dick began his solo pediatric practice. He merged his practice with Alan Meyers and Linda Waldman in 1996, where he worked until his retirement.

Sandy always had intense interest in a variety of aspects concerning education. As a stay-at-home mom, with three children, all of whom went through Guilford Public Schools, she was a frequent classroom volunteer and an active PTO member. She served on the Guilford Board of Education for twelve years. During this time she began and facilitated a new mother's support group at Dick's office. When all the children were in school, Sandy went back to work, not as a nurse, but as a teacher. She was hired as an associate teacher in kindergarten at The Foote School. Later she became a kindergarten head teacher.

The Guilford Mentoring program began in 2000, but Sandy was on board long before that. As a member of the Board of Education, she was on the committee exploring the possibility of youth mentoring in Guilford's Public Schools. She now serves as a member of the Guilford Youth Mentoring Board of Directors. Soon after she retired she entered the program as a mentor, because "Barbara Solomon had a student who needed a mentor." If Barbara isn't the person bringing you to mentoring, then odds are it's Sandy's brother, Joe Goldberg. That's what happened to Dick. "For years Joe kept 'suggesting' that I become a mentor. When more time became available, I began mentoring on my day off," he recalled. "I'm still with my original student having begun when he was in first grade." After two years of being his mentor, Dick sensed the significance of their relationship. "After summer vacation, he ran up and gave me a big hug; that was phenomenal!"

Mentoring truly is a family activity for the Whelans. The importance of mentoring even touched their son Zachary. He was able to mentor for a brief period during his college career.

With a new camera in hand, Dick is rekindling a hobby of photography. He and Sandy are taking ballroom dancing lessons and have travelled some. This year was the first time they were able to spend a month in Sanibel Florida. In addition to mentoring, Dick is the medical consultant at Foote School, serving as a member of the health team.

Since her retirement, Sandy has worked at Foote School helping with the kindergarten admission process. "That's where I really get my 'kid fix'!" Sandy is a board member on the Guilford Fund for Education and a member of the Grants committee. She volunteers for a literacy program through the Jewish Literacy Council at Nathan Hale School.

For Sandy, mentoring is all about being there for her student. "It is important to let a child know that you are a constant in their life and that you are someone who cares about them."

Dick and his mentee play a lot of games. "He changes the rules," he said, "but all kids do! He is *my* mentor when we play "LIFE" - he makes sure I can use the electronic things!"

One of his favorite memories is receiving a card in the mail from his student. "I had given him some postcards a couple of years ago to send to me in the summer. When he was away last year, all of a

sudden a card arrived from him. That time and seeing his face light up when I came to watch his basketball game are just two memorable mentoring experiences. I look forward to mentoring each week and I realize that our time together is of value to both of us.”

To find out how you can become a mentor or help support our program, please call Guilford Youth Mentoring, (203) 453-2741 ext. 269, email us at solomonb@guilford.k12.ct.us or visit our website at www.guilfordmentoring.org