



SHOWN WITH THEIR TEACHER, Penny Arnoldy, on the last day of school on Friday were several students from the Oberlin Head Start class, (from left) Dillon Kuhlman, son of Chris and Windy Kuhlman; Jesse Hendrickson, son of Patti and Scott Hendrickson; Emily Willis, daughter of Lauren Willis and Kevin Cooper; Brooklynn Kelley, daughter of Chris and Nicole Kelley; Arika Marshall, daughter of Joni Marshall and Rodney Marshall, and Paisley Zodrow, daughter of Chelsey and Leigh Zodrow.

Retiree has long history of teaching kids

By MARYLOU OLSON
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When Penny Arnoldy steps down this week as the Head Start teacher at Oberlin Elementary School, she will be closing a chapter in education that began in an inner-city preschool in downtown Detroit, her first teaching position after receiving her Early Childhood Education certification at the University of Michigan in Dearborn.

She was born in Madison, Ind., during World War II, while her father, Lloyd Emerson, of Oberlin, was stationed there with the Army. He and her mother, the former Virginia Landau, were both 1938 graduates of Decatur Community High School. She said that her parents later owned the Green Lantern Cafe in Oberlin before he started working for Kansas-Nebraska Gas Company. He was later transferred to Leoti, Hoxie and then Lakin, where she and her sister, Nikki, and brother, Patrick, graduated from high school.

Ms. Arnoldy attended Kansas State University and after graduating she said that she and her husband moved to New Brighton, Minn., where their two daughters, Paige and Andrea, were born. The family moved several other places, and it was during that time that she studied at the university in Dearborn.

She opened a private preschool in Albert Lea, Minn., with a friend and later taught at Margaret Butler's Preschool in Edina, Minn., and St. David's Preschool in Minnetonka. It was about that time that she became aware of the help needed by "special needs" children, those who have both physical and mental handicaps.

She said that since she had an aunt who had Down's Syndrome, she began researching disabilities and learning styles which might help special-needs children. When her marriage ended, she and her daughters decided to leave the city, where there were 2,500 students in the high school.

"My daughters wanted to move to Oberlin where their grandparents, the Emersons, had recently moved after retirement from the gas company (now K-N Energy) in Lakin. After a visit over Easter break to make sure they understood what a change that would be, the girls and I moved to Oberlin., where I took over Little Rascal's Preschool from Jeri Buchholz for a year."

She said she then started Sunshine Preschool, where she did a combination daycare and preschool program with Nancy Macfee for



PENNY ARNOLDY, senior picture, Lakin High School.

several years.

"When I finally faced the fact that I could not support my family by owning a child day care center," she recalled, "I got a job teaching kindergarten, Title I and second grade at Clayton for three years. By this time, both daughters had graduated from Decatur Community High School and were attending Fort Hays State."

At that time, she decided that she wanted to try another field, so she took a job as a school prevention consultant in Colby and trained students and teachers in northwest Kansas schools in drug and alcohol abuse prevention for three years. When the Drug Free Schools money dried up, she went to work for the Goodland School District as a family advocate trainer and worked with parents in the district for two years. She said she helped put together a preschool and family program which won an Excellence in Education Award from the state just as the state cut the money off.

"I then decided that since my parents were getting older and my mother's health was deteriorating, I would return to Oberlin as the Decatur County Head Start teacher in 1995. She said she finally finished a master's degree in early childhood special education in 1998.

Head Start is a federal preschool program that serves lower-income and "at-risk" students 3 and 4, but

includes children from all income levels to make a class of 17 to 19 students. At least 10 percent of the students have a disability. Ms. Arnoldy said she has done her best with all of the special-needs children and loves all of her students.

She said the program works with parents to help them set goals for themselves and their families.

"Although we have children four hours a day, my job is full time, documenting all of the information, following up with parents and consultants, providing parent meetings monthly and researching new techniques and ideas to improve the learning of each child," she said.

"For much of the 17 years I have been working with Head Start, I have had help from Karen Smith, who teaches and helps with all the various duties of the program, keeps me on track and provides support. I am fortunate to have had many wonderful women work with us as well. This year, we have Patti Hendrickson and Windy Kuhlman helping us with 19 very busy and wonderful kids.

"While teaching Head Start, I have had the joy of teaching some children of parents who were enrolled in the Sunshine Preschool many years ago.

"I have seen great changes in education over the years. Head Start has changed a lot since I started teaching here in 1995. When I taught kinder-

garten in Clayton, children who knew their colors, could count to 10 and write their first names were ready to start kindergarten, and in kindergarten, we spent all year learning the letters of the alphabet and maybe some could read a few words by spring.

"Now, we expect children to know colors, all the letters of the alphabet, be able to count to 20, make up rhyming words, know the sounds of letters, be able to recreate a pattern, sort items and a multitude of other academic tasks before they leave Head Start to begin kindergarten."

She said she has loved teaching the little ones, and although the job has changed dramatically over the years, she strives to get each and every child ready for kindergarten with a positive attitude toward school. She believes that doing well in school is the surest way to a happy and successful life and wants that for every one of the children she has taught.

Ms. Arnoldy said that since her parents have died and her daughters teach in Colby, she is planning to move to Colby. One daughter, Paige Gawith, is teaching special education at Colby High School and has two children, Gunner, a junior at the University of Advancing Technology in Tempe, Ariz., and Madison, who graduates from Colby High School this month and will attend Cornell University in the fall.

Daughter Andrea Schuette teaches at Colby Middle School while her husband Gary has a home remodeling business. They have three sons: Henry is a junior at Colby High, Eric is a freshman and Dalton is completing the fifth grade.

"This has been a wonderful, frustrating, challenging, rewarding and important job," Ms. Arnoldy said, "and I will miss the children and their families a great deal. I have tied more shoes than most people, but I've also received more knee hugs than most.

"The love I get from all of the little ones has filled my life with joy, and I am so proud when I see one of 'my' kids doing well as they grow up.

"Once I get settled into a new home, I will probably be involved in teaching as a volunteer and going to lots of school events. I will miss all the hugs around my knees and the joy of seeing a child learn something new and being excited about it.

"I will be replaced by Deb Helm, who has been teaching at the Rawlins County Head Start, so I know I am leaving the children in good hands."



LEADING THE BAND at the Lakin High School as majorette was Penny Arnoldy, daughter of the late Lloyd and Virginia (Landau) Emerson, who has taught the Oberlin Head Start program since 1995.