

## **'Mama Weeks' retiring after 39 years in education**

Longtime Don Lugo High activities director Connie Weeks will retire July 24, leaving a legacy of what she hopes are good citizens for the Chino Valley.

"All of us on this campus really work to keep our kids positive," Weeks said. "I've taught and we've all taught the kids to be responsible citizens. That's why the food drive, toy drive, and community Easter Egg Hunt we do at Don Lugo are so important."

Weeks joined the Chino school 39 years ago as a math teacher after interning at Nogales High in La Puente. She also taught computer programming for a time. Weeks began co-teaching a leadership class at Don Lugo in 1978 and 32 years ago became the school's activities director.

Her work has earned an Outstanding Leadership Program award 15 times from the California Association of Directors of Activities (CADA).

Through the years, she has overseen a school officer political convention, complete with delegates and voting by showing a student ID card; bonfire rallies at Chino Fairgrounds for the Homecoming and Milk Can football games; Kiss A Cow and Kiss A Pig promotions to motivate students; a hay bucking competition that highlighted the school's agriculture department; an Air Band program with lip-syncing competitors; a Zombie Maze Walk at Halloween; and College Town field trips for juniors to explore higher education.

The leadership students have also coordinated a Thanksgiving food drive for the community since the 1980s, and more recently, a Christmas food and toy drive. They have also sponsored the Community Easter Egg Hunt since the mid-1990s when they learned the City of Chino had decided to no longer host the event.

The Thanksgiving and Christmas food basket programs, which started as a drive for disabled veterans, have grown so large that Don Lugo now provides holiday food for families in need from Don Lugo, Ramona Junior High, Don Lugo's feeder elementary schools, and other elementary schools in the area. One banner year, the students collected more than 22,000 cans of food, as well as other food items, Weeks said.

"We give the kids the power to run the program and have character education built into it," Weeks said. "We're not known as a program that does posters only."

She is especially proud of the annual winter Senior Retreat in the nearby mountains, a program that all seniors may attend if they have a C grade average and are on track to graduate. That program began 36 years ago with 35 students. Don Lugo is the only high school in California to offer the three-day retreat, in which staff and chaperones volunteer their time, Weeks said.

"It's just a bonding time for the seniors," she said. "At senior retreat, you learn you're not the only one going through something."

Seniors attending the event are asked to make a copy of their handprint, a commitment to helping another senior graduate, no matter what school they attend. Seniors also sign a commencement gown as their own vow to graduate. The handprints and graduation gown are displayed prominently in Don Lugo's commencement ceremony each year.

The act of seniors committing to helping one another embodies Don Lugo's slogan of "One School, One Family," Weeks said.

Don Lugo, which opened as a ninth-grade only school in 1972 and didn't have a full graduating class until 1980, searched for its own reputation for many years as the second high school in the district, Weeks said.

That sense of being the new kid on the block rallied the school's students and staff to achieve great things, she said.

"We're a staff together. Here everybody's on equal footing because we're all doing what's best for the kids," Weeks said.

Weeks credited collaborative principals and numerous teachers who are Don Lugo alumni for the positive and supportive atmosphere at the school. "So many of the staff members who come here, never leave," she said. "And we have learned to listen to the kids."

Her husband Michael, a retired computer programmer, said the couple "will be rich now" because Weeks won't be spending so much money on students. When asked how many children they have, her husband answers "150 a year," referring to Don Lugo's Leadership students.

Don Lugo's class of 1995 was the first to call the activities director "Mama Weeks" for her maternal attitude towards her students.

Weeks said she will miss being with "her kids" and the senior retreat the most.

"I've taken the leadership program as far as I can take it because I've run out of energy," Mrs. Weeks said. "It needs some new leadership."

In retirement, Weeks plans to visit the 10 major league baseball fields she hasn't yet seen, and then visit them all again.

Pictured: Longtime Don Lugo High activities director is surrounded by the school's 2015-2016 Leadership students moments before Don Lugo's 2015 commencement ceremony. The new leadership students provided a "welcome line" for the graduating seniors.