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Kingsley to be inducted into Kentucky Teacher Hall of Fame

By Scott Hagerman Messenger-Inquirer
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Longtime Owensboro Public Schools teacher Linda Kingsley works with Emerson Academy junior Kiasia Thomas during class Monday in Owensboro. Kingsley will be inducted into the Kentucky Teacher Hall of Fame.

Photo by Greg Eans, Messenger-Inquirer | geans@messenger-inquirer.com

Linda Kingsley had never thought about being recognized for her career as a teacher in Owensboro Public Schools, which began in 1962.

That's why she was initially convinced that Chris Gaddis, executive director/alumni relations for OPS' The Foundation for Excellence, was joking with her Friday when he announced she had been chosen for induction into the Kentucky Teacher Hall of Fame, which is housed on Western Kentucky University's campus in Bowling Green.

"Chris is kind of a jokester, so I was surprised," Kingsley said. "I didn't even know there was such an award. I'd never heard of it. I did not know there was any nomination."

The Kentucky Teacher Hall of Fame was established in 2000 through a gift from former governor Louie B. Nunn. The purpose of the hall of fame is to recognize Kentuckians who have made significant contributions to the teaching profession.

Anita Burnette, former Owensboro High School principal and interim superintendent for the school district, was among multiple people who wrote letters of recommendation for Kingsley's nomination.

"Mrs. Kingsley has been a cornerstone of the Owensboro Public Schools district for nearly 60 years, serving in various capacities as a full-time teacher, substitute and unwavering supporter," Burnette wrote. "Her dedication to the field of education is unparalleled, and her impact on our students and faculty is immeasurable."

While Kingsley can't now imagine a career outside education, it wasn't her initial calling. In fact, it was her struggle to settle on a career that directly led to education.

"I just kind of fell into it when I was a student at Kentucky Wesleyan and I was having a hard time deciding what major I wanted," she said. "I finally said, 'Just add the numbers of (class) hours I have and let's see where they fall.' And they said, 'Well, it looks like English or literature classes,' and I said, 'That sounds good. We'll major in English.' They said, 'What do you plan to do with that?' I said, 'What are the options?' They said, 'journalism, school teaching.' I said, 'Well, maybe teaching.' So I just sort of fell into it."

Kingsley did her student teaching at Owensboro High School, which made her feel at home when she got her first full-time position at the high school teaching 10th-grade English and 11th- and 12th-grade speech. She stayed full-time through the 1967 school year, then took time off to be a stay-at-home mother.

"I took some time off when the boys were born and growing up, and then I started back part-time and subbing," she said. "Then I was doing some longterm subbing at the junior high school, and (then-principal) Fred Reeves said, 'You're crazy to be doing this part-time. You need to get back into it full-time.' So I went back to the high school."

Kingsley returned to the classroom full-time in 1986, teaching AP English and debate. She remained in that position through the end of the 2009-2010 school year, when she retired.

"I didn't think I was done," she said. "Even though I felt like it was time to retire, there were some people who were going to be on maternity leave that next year and had asked if I would you be willing to (substitute for them). I sort of became the sub for teachers expecting babies. I did a few long term, which I liked because it gave me the ability to really teach, but also knowing there was an end to it."

"I really enjoy being around high school-age students and teachers. It's a place where people are happy at least 99% of the time, students and colleagues are happy, administrators are happy. It's a workplace environment that has just kept me wanting to be there."

Kingsley said the basics of being a teacher haven't changed a lot during her career, but much is different from when she started, including her approach.

"There's now more parent involvement, which is good, and I would say I've become more mellow," she said. "You've had to adjust. There was a time when you could pretty much expect the whole class to do the same thing, and now, individual differences, you have to account for that more. It is just as enjoyable, especially as a substitute when you don't have to do the paperwork and you don't have to go to meetings and the professional development.

"I loved doing it when I had to, but once I didn't, it was pretty nice to walk out and not have a faculty meeting. It's like the best of all things."

Kingsley's substitute schedule varies, with her teaching five days a week at times. She was substituting at Emerson Academy on Monday.

"You hope you make a difference in somebody's life," Kingsley said. "You don't have 100% success, and that keeps you humble, when you know your goal is to reach everybody, inspire everybody, and you don't. But at the end of the day, you think maybe I made a difference in some way, and every day you have that goal."

Kingsley said she'll keep teaching as long as she has the passion.

"Every year, I think well, this could be the last time I enjoy doing this," she said. "But I'm going to keep doing it as long as I enjoy doing it."

There will be an awards dinner at the end of the year for the 2024 induction class. The honor may have sunk in to Kingsley by then.

"I read those letters of recommendation, and my first thought was who are they talking about?" Kingsley joked. "I know I don't deserve this kind of honor. I've taught with so many people who are certainly more deserving. But I guess these five people who nominated, they thought I did something right, and I appreciate that.

"I think I just feel overwhelmed that I was selected and feel humble and undeserving."

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