

The Inspiration of EDUCATION

By Matt Bendell | Photo by potshots photography

After a lifelong career in education, **Joanna Hayes** is proud to participate in the rewarding profession of teaching.

Originally from England, Joanna Hayes has spent her adult life living and teaching exceptional students in Florida.

Ever since she was a child, **Joanna Hayes** of **Avalon Park** knew she wanted to be a teacher. "I'd line up my stuffed animals and teach them when I was little," says Hayes. "I used to love to play school with my friends, and, naturally, I was the teacher." For someone like Hayes who also loves working with children, becoming a teacher seemed like a natural fit.

Hayes says she became involved in education because she loved school as a student, and she has accomplished a great deal during her 33-year career in Florida schools. After 31 years of teaching in Broward County, Hayes moved with her husband to be nearer to their two married children **Ryan** and **Courtney** and grandchildren **Jack** and **Luke** as well as Hayes' mother, who is 90. They settled in Avalon Park in 2006 because they enjoyed the small town atmosphere.

Hayes has been teaching in Orange County at Blankner Elementary School for two and a half years and is currently working with gifted students. Beginning her teaching career in general education for fourth and fifth graders, she went on to get her master's in specific learning disabilities (SLD) from Florida Atlantic University. After graduating, she taught a resource

SLD class for a few years and served as an exceptional student education specialist and an intermediate specialist.

But Hayes is a teacher who likes to learn. Through the years, she also got her gifted teaching endorsement and an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement. She has been teaching gifted education for more than 20 years and helped pilot a program for highly gifted students. Although not currently in use, the program provided an environment for hands-on learning specific to students' different learning styles.

Among her many accomplishments, Hayes has been the recipient of numerous teaching awards and various grants. Most recently, she was the recipient of the EXCEL Award from the Foundation for Excellence in Education, which recognized her for her motivation of high achievers in her classroom.

When asked about her motivation and drive, Hayes says she is inspired daily by the exceptional students she teaches. "They inspire me to challenge them, en-

gage them and facilitate their learning," she says. "I am constantly inspired by their desire to learn."

She says one of the high points during her years of teaching is when students come back to see her or send her e-mails. "When they remember 'life in Mrs. Hayes' class, it makes me feel proud that I was one of their favorite teachers, one of the teachers who believed in them or one of their teachers they will never forget."

Outside the classroom, Hayes is involved with a number of community volunteer organizations, including the Orlando Frontier Civitans who participate in community events each week. Most recently, Hayes and other club members adopted underprivileged children and committed to buying gifts for them during the holidays. On occasion, she cooks for the Ronald McDonald House as well.

Whether teaching, continuing her own education, volunteering or enjoying time with her family, Hayes always actively strives to take part in making our community a better place to live. ■

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