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Longtime drama teacher directs final show this week



Vickie Lucido, drama teacher at Walter Colton Middle School, is retiring after teaching for 27 years at the school. (Juan Reyes — Monterey Herald)

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Monterey >> The Walter Colton Middle School drama club has been under the watchful eye of Vickie Lucido for a little more than a quarter century. But the longtime drama teacher is making her final curtain call this week after 27 years as director of the program.

“Part of me says yes, part of me says I don’t know,” Lucido said. “It’s hard for me to let go of all this.”

Lucido, 60, started working for Monterey Peninsula Unified School District in 1985, teaching drama at Fitch Middle School, which is now known as Seaside Middle School. She wound up leaving after she heard it was scheduled to shut down in the 1990s.

Since then, she’s been the drama, English and social studies teacher at Walter Colton.

“I’m telling you, when I was at Fitch it was military (families), so the kids would move every two years,” Lucido said. “Whereas when I came here and (received) the community support, I felt like I had died and gone to heaven.”

Lucido is a “product” of the MPUSD system, attending Del Rey Woods Elementary, Fremont Junior High, which no longer exists, and finally Monterey High School.

Lucido said theater has been a part of her life since she was a child when she performed skits and songs for her parents. She wanted to be an actress growing up and eventually became part of the community theater at Monterey Peninsula College.

“I just didn’t have the tough skin for it,” Lucido said. “So, I decided to create what I wanted, which was this safe place where everybody is supporting each other.”

Lyric Colby, an eighth grader at Walter Colton, said she joined the drama club in sixth grade and tried out for the play “Cinderella.” She had already been encouraged in the fifth grade to get involved with clubs and thought drama was the perfect match for her.

Colby said she also thought Lucido seemed like a nice person and a “cool” director. However, she soon found out that her new drama teacher was strict, but in a good way, and passionate about putting on a great show.

“At first I’m like, ‘Oh wow, this lady is scary,’” Colby said. “But then once I got to know her after these three years, she’s awesome.... She’s amazing. I hate to see her go, actually.”

Colby made the cut for “Cinderella,” performed in the show and said she remembers it was a good feeling because theater was still all new to her. Plus, she mentioned that if it weren’t for Lucido she probably wouldn’t have been able to overcome one of her biggest fears: stage fright.

“(Lucido) has this thing that she does, I don’t know what it is,” Colby said. “But, she has this thing where she makes everybody belong. She makes everybody feel loved and like they’re part of a big family.”

Cathy Poochigian was part of that big family right around the time Lucido started her journey at Walter Colton. Poochigian was another MPUSD product, having attended Bay View Elementary, Monterey High and Monterey Peninsula College.

Poochigian continued to be an integral part of Lucido’s drama department by being in charge of costumes during the school’s annual spring musical. She has spent the past 12 years with Lucido and even takes time from her job for Cirque du Soleil’s KÀ at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, where she won Employee of the Year in 2012.

“Just to take all those things that I learned here and implement them over there, it’s giving back to my community,” Poochigian said.

Poochigian is part of a team that Lucido has assembled throughout the years. Frank Lucido, Vickie’s husband, was in charge of sound production but has passed down job to Dustin Pratt, who is Poochigian’s husband. Kathy Kopp also helps out with costumes, while Ellen Collord is in charge of vocals and Sheri Bouwers watches over the choreography.

“I am incredibly proud of what we’ve created and how we maintain it every year,” Poochigian said. “We are a group of individuals that does our own thing throughout the year and then we come together between January and April (or) May, every year.”

Poochigian said there can be up to eight months of silence between her and Lucido, but they still manage to pick up where they left off. And when it comes time to get together, Lucido raises the bar each year so the kids and coaches can put on a good production.

“(Lucido) is a thousand percent dedicated to making sure her productions are at the top of the game and they are,” Poochigian said. “They are in line with stuff that I do in Vegas ... and it’s a middle school.”

Lucido said her inspiration to come back each year to seeing kids excel in not just theatre, but in life.

“I want to do it for that one kid,” Lucido said. “And then one kid after another kid, the kids will come up to me asking, ‘Mrs. Lucido, what show are we going to do next year?’ I see that spark in them and that makes me say, OK.”

Lucido said it breaks her heart knowing this week will be her final curtain call at Walter Colton. And after 27 years of running the show, she said the one thing she’ll miss the most is seeing the kids and her crew.

“That’s the biggest reward of all. Seeing kids shine, seeing my coaches shine. Coming together as a team and creating something that we’ll never forget. I’m going to miss working with them,” Lucido said.

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