

Martha Love and Mary Pat Wells recall their years in La Porte ISD

In observance of the 100th anniversary of La Porte ISD, The Leader will be featuring stories about some of the educators who had a significant impact on the history of the district. Retired teacher and principal Martha Love and her long-time friend and fellow teacher Mary Pat Wells recently sat down one afternoon to reminisce about their early years in the district.

“This is Martha Love. Her name says it all.”

That’s how La Porte ISD Superintendent of Schools Lloyd W. Graham introduced the long-time district educator to a group of new teachers, describing her as “the heart of the district” during her almost 50-year career in education.

The love she has for teaching and for the children of La Porte shines through as she talks about her years in education at the home of Mary Pat Wells, with whom she taught first grade at La Porte Elementary. Both of the teachers chose to bring up their families in La Porte and devoted the largest part of their careers to educating La Porte ISD students.

Wells and her husband, Lloyd, joined the La Porte ISD family as teachers in 1963, while Love came in 1967.

“It was a much smaller district, and all of the faculty fit in the cafeteria,” Love said. “The whole school district could come and have Christmas dinner.”

They ended up with classrooms next door to one another at La Porte Elementary, where they team taught their group of first graders.

“We got tired of walking around, so they cut a hole between our rooms,” Wells laughed. She taught science, and Love taught social studies, and then they would join their classes for activities together.

“I can remember the day we made Stone Soup, and we did it in my room, and the kids just thought that was wonderful,” Wells said, explaining that the activity followed the reading of the *Stone Soup* folktale.

“And we put a rock in it that we had cleaned pretty thoroughly before we put it in,” Love said, noting that each child got a paper cupful of the culinary creation.

Love describes a more “relaxed time,” when they often found learning opportunities outdoors. They named two trees “Teddy Deciduous” and “Connie Coniferous” as they studied about trees that lose their leaves during the winter and those that keep them.

“We did a lot of learning in non-academic spots,” Love said. “We went outside and learned rather than sticking strictly to reading, writing and arithmetic, and they had a good time.”

One St. Patrick’s Day, they recalled going outdoors with their classes in search of leprechauns.

“One of my children—and I don’t remember which one now—came screaming up to me that a leprechaun had bitten him,” Love explained. The mark on his arm revealed that the child, who was missing his front two teeth, had bitten himself.

“We called his mother and told her that he had been bitten by a leprechaun, but that the nurse had cleaned it off and we didn’t think he would have to have a shot,” Love chuckled. “And he improved immediately when the word ‘shot’ was mentioned, of course.”

One story prompts the recall of another, and the friends of over 50 years laugh as they tell each of them, alternately filling in details to make the stories complete.



Long-time La Porte ISD educators Mary Pat Wells, left, and Martha Love reminisce about their days teaching at La Porte Elementary School in the late 1960s.

Stories of when they took the children on a field trip to see Mr. Durden’s chickens. Or when their students who had never been out of La Porte thought they were going to fall off the freeway overpass on their way to the Fat Stock Show. Or when they took the children to see Santa Claus at Foley’s in Houston and one of their students started screaming midway up the escalator.

Wells retired from teaching in 1986 with 24 years of service to the district, with another six years in California and Spring Branch ISD prior to La Porte ISD. Love retired in 1997 as principal of Bayshore Elementary School.

Love said that she didn’t want to leave La Porte Elementary School when she was tapped for the Bayshore position.

“I was scared to death when I took my car down there and got out and walked into that faculty meeting. I had no idea what being the principal of a school

was going to be like,” she said. “And it worked well.”

“I was so blessed with a wonderful staff at Bayshore,” she added.

Still a part of the community, Wells and Love have had the opportunity to see many of their students go on to leadership positions in the city, schools, businesses and more. Two of the La Porte City Councilmen are Wells’ former students, as are several La Porte ISD professional staff members.

“It’s fun to run into them here and there,” Wells said.

Love laughs as she relates the story of being stopped at Kroger by a woman who sought permission to ask her “a very personal question.”

“She said, ‘Who are the gray-haired men who come up and hug you?’” Love explained. “And I said, ‘I taught all of them first grade!’”

La Porte has grown up quite a bit since the Wells and Love families first moved here. Wells described the cow pasture behind the house they built in Shady Oaks on the last street in south La Porte; today the Bayport terminal is behind their former home. And when Love and her husband, Bill, first arrived in La Porte for his new job, she maintained that she would not live here.

“My famous last words, when Bill brought me to La Porte, were, ‘You can work here if you want to, but I’m living in Houston,’” she said. “And this is my 55th year here. It was a wonderful place to raise children.”

Love’s two children, Lloyd and Evelyn, both graduated from La Porte High School and followed in their mother’s footsteps as educators. Evelyn Love is a retired campus administrator, while Lloyd Love teaches outdoor education at Pasadena Memorial High School and was named Pasadena ISD’s 2016 Teacher of the Year.

Wells’ children, Marilyn Neumann and Bob Wells are also La Porte High School graduates. Bob is a senior project manager at KBR, while Marilyn is an administrative assistant in the fine arts department at La Porte ISD.

And though times have changed, Love maintains that the quality of the education system in La Porte has not. After retiring as principal, she immediately signed back up with the district to tutor students and mentor teachers—a labor of love she enjoyed for almost 16 more years.

“I think a child can come here and go to school and get a wonderful education—I truly and honestly believe that,” she said. “I think they have a lot of opportunities here, and I think that makes a difference.”