

## Jill Virts Memorial Scholarship

Jill Virts was a psychologist for the Red Creek Central School District for 30 years. The tremendous impact she had on hundreds, maybe thousands, of students who walked the halls of this district might never be fully known, but her lasting legacy will continue on. Jill loved her career, her colleagues, students, and the community. She was a passionate, kind, charitable, highly respected, dedicated, professional who believed that all students deserved at least one caring, trusting adult in their lives. She never turned her back on a student; providing the guidance and support they needed to help them navigate their elementary school, middle school, and high school experience. As a psychologist on the Committee of Special Education, she led countless discussions about student's learning styles using diagnostic testing information on each student to create a plan for the student to ensure success. She was an advocate for each student and her problem-solving and creative thinking skills were relied on often. She worked tirelessly to help students who did not fit into the social clichés or social norms, to support the young child who was experiencing difficulties in school, to cultivate a "girls group" where young girls could join in space and feel comfortable, and to create a therapeutic space where students felt heard and supported. Jill was passionate about our community, and helping children and their families flourish - advocating for children's well-being, making sure their voices were heard in the school community.

Jill was more than a school psychologist to the people and students she encountered - she was a mentor, a safe place, a play therapist, a confidant, an innovator, a passionate advocate, and a true friend\_\_\_\_\_. The Jill Virts Scholarship will go to a student who embodies the qualities that made Jill Virts the inspiration that she was and continues to be.

The Jill Virts Scholarship will go to a student who demonstrated the following:

Accepting of and kind to others

A trustworthy and empathetic listener

A creative, problem solver who is able to advocate for their beliefs  
Commitment or passion about helping people and the community

Stories.....

- 1) One day, several members of the Red Creek counseling staff weren't able to find Jill. They looked all around the building, asking staff members and teachers if they had seen her. Finally, someone said that they thought she was in the fitness center. Puzzled by why the school psychologist would be in the fitness center during the school day, Jill's colleague walked to the fitness center. When she opened the pool doors - she was shocked. There, in the pool, was Jill swimming with a young, elementary school boy who was undergoing chemotherapy and, therefore, missed the recent swim lesson. Jill, in her true manner, was going above and beyond to help a kiddo feel safe and supported during his time of need.
- 2) A few weeks after Jill passed away, a teacher shared a story with one of Jill's closet colleagues. The teacher shared that when she first began teaching at Red Creek, she had a high-needs student in her class who, oftentimes, was difficult to support while making sure her entire class was kept on track. The teacher recalled that every single day during the year, she would hear Jill's high-heeled shoes walking down the hallway to her class. Without fail, Jill would come into her classroom and sit with the student to offer him extra support. She would help regulate him, which allowed the teacher to continue supporting her whole class. Years later, this teacher shared that Jill's kindness was the reason she made it through this year - and continued teaching for years to come.
- 3) Jill created a "skirt group" - which was a support group for high school girls that focused on physical wellness, friendship, trust, mental wellness, and healthy relationships. This group was created with the foundation that girls deserved a space to feel safe, cared for, and heard.
- 4) Jill's advocacy helped a girl be removed from an abusive household and placed with a loving, caring, and supportive family - whom she is still with today.

- 5) Jill created, with a team of red creek community and school members, an event after graduation where seniors could go to celebrate their accomplishments and friendships in a fun, safe, and healthy way the night of graduation - Operation Graduation. Jill worked with several individuals to create a well-respected and fun evening, that is still occurring to this day.
- 6) A few years prior to Jill's retirement, she had the idea to bring her trusty dog, Riley, to school. Met with a bit of uncertainty - Jill created a proposal for the school board and administrations advocating for the introduction of Red Creek's first "Therapy Dog." After several months of conversation and advocacy, Riley was welcomed to school. Before long, Riley and Jill became synonymous - and Riley's picture even made it in the yearbook!

Candidates must read these stories and write a 1-2 page reflection.