

SPRING 2023

A Pillar of Sears

ANN RICE TO RETIRE AFTER A REMARKABLE CAREER

CALENDAR

April 26

Regular Board of
Education Meeting
7:30 p.m.

April 27

47th Annual Fine Arts
Night
5:30 p.m.

May 1-5

Teacher Appreciation
Week

May 16

3rd and 4th Grade
Concert
6:45 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.

May 18-19

Spring Book Fair



Education comes easy to Sears first-grade teacher Ann Rice. In her own words, it's something she "has always wanted to do." However, all good things come to an end, with Rice retiring at the end of the 2022-2023 school year. She leaves behind a thirty-three-year illustrious legacy at Sears and now embarks on life's next chapter.

Initially, getting into education seemed logical for Rice, who came from a large family and explained that she enjoyed taking care of her younger siblings and did her fair share of babysitting growing up.

"I decided that education was a way for me to reach young children in helping them grow and learn about themselves and the world around them," Rice said.

Rice had taught early childhood for nine years in a small town south of Chicago but was looking to return closer to her home of Wilmette. In 1990, The Joseph Sears School was looking for an early childhood educator who could develop and implement a special education program for in-district students.

"At the time, Sears only serviced a learning disability resource program. Northern Suburban Special Education District (NSSD) was the co-op

that provided special education services to North Shore schools," Rice explained.

In 1990, Kenilworth School District 38 decided to move this programming in-house, Rice recounts, adding that she was hired to develop and implement the special education program for primary students. Rice served in this role for eight years and then began teaching first-grade in 1998.

"After spending thirty-three years at Sears, I realize how many students and parents I have had the privilege of knowing. I have established close relationships with many students and families, which has been rewarding. I have felt their support and admire their dedication towards education and Sears," Rice said.

Rice pointed to her relationships with colleagues through the years as one of the most fulfilling parts of the job. She explained further that the entire Sears staff comprises a caring community where teachers are committed to children and work hard at their craft.

For Rice, the transition to retirement will be met with many emotions, with her describing that one of the hardest parts about moving on will be missing her first-grade students.



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Artistic Achievements

USING VISUAL ARTS TO ENHANCE STUDENT EDUCATION

Visual arts are a fundamental piece of an educational journey. At Sears, the entire arts curriculum aims to allow students to apply prior knowledge, learn new techniques, develop skills, and apply principles of art and composition. Each unit features clear objectives for learning but also room for self-expression. Junior Kindergarten through eighth-grade students are given the canvas and tools to achieve the *Portrait of a Sears Graduate*.

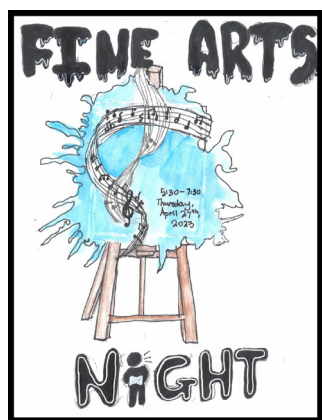
"Our arts program is designed to expose students to the arts and allow them to experience and experiment with different art forms throughout the years. It's an exploratory program," Sears Art Teacher Karolina Bajkowska said.

Each year, every grade level goes through different art projects focusing on materials and techniques, Bajkowska added. The skills students learn throughout the year build on one another and increase in complexity.

"As students get older, they have more creative freedom and agency in what they do," Bajkowska said. "They get to use the skills they have built over the years."

Bajkowska explained that students learn about the elements of art as part of the curriculum. They are also exposed to famous artists and discover an appreciation for art. Additionally, they learn essential life skills through the creative process, all in hopes of students achieving the *Portrait of a Sears Graduate*.

Crafting art is just one piece of the medium's overall importance at Sears. Highlighting student artwork is just as paramount as the creative process. This is done in a variety of ways. One avenue is through the "Fine Arts Night," a yearly fine arts show tradition held at Sears for the school community.



On April 27 at 5:30 p.m., The Joseph Sears School will hold the 47th Annual Fine Arts Night, an evening dedicated to celebrating the fine arts created by students. This long-standing tradition is a way to celebrate the many art forms taught at Sears, and during the event, every student has two to three pieces of visual art showcased, Bajkowska explained.

"Every wall, every blank space in the school, is covered in student art. Students love to show it off to their parents," Bajkowska said.

Another way that Sears highlights students' artistic achievements is through the Superintendent's Art Award. Starting in 2005, at the end of every year, the superintendent has chosen one to two pieces of art per grade level to recognize and highlight throughout the school, Bajkowska explained.

"We give students a certificate, and the artwork is framed, marked, and displayed either in the hallways or the offices," Bajkowska said, adding that the artwork remains displayed until the student graduates from Sears.



Junior high students can also display their artwork at a New Trier High School art exhibit, Bajkowska explained, adding that this is an excellent opportunity for students to cherish and celebrate creations made by peers from the many feeder schools.

Art created by Sears students isn't just showcased in the immediate area. At the North Cook Intermediate Service Center, one piece of Sears student art is highlighted in their newly renovated office spaces this year. A fifth-grade student at Sears created the selected art piece, which touched on themes of peace, hope, and positivity, Bajkowska described.

"Because we had already done artwork for our Caring School Community, it was really easy for us to find a piece to submit," Bajkowska said. "The art piece we submitted was chosen and will be framed and be part of a permanent collection at their offices," Bajkowska said.

The arts program at Sears aims to enrich the educational experience for students by not only building life skills but by developing an appreciation for the beauty around them and the complexity of the world, Bajkowska explained.

"I love to show students and inspire them to be mindful of their surroundings and to notice the intricacies of the natural world, observe what's around them, and appreciate it. I think it helps them develop that sensibility and helps with those critical life problem-solving skills, fine motor skills, and craftsmanship. There are so many competencies that can be transferred to different areas," Bajkowska said.

Arra Named Teacher of the Year

THE NORA PROJECT HONORS SEARS EDUCATOR



On March 10, fourth-grade teacher Jennifer Arra was named **The Nora Project's 2023 Educator of the Year**. Arra will be honored at The Nora Project's Thrive Together Gala on Thursday, May 11, at 6:00 p.m. at PalmHouse in Evanston.

Each year, The Nora Project recognizes an educator who promotes the mission of promoting disability inclusion in schools. A press release from

The Nora Project reads: "We knew she [Arra] was special from the moment she began The Nora Project Training Camp in July 2020."

During that camp, Arra made a goal that she wanted to make inclusion less of a "big deal" in school. Noting that inclusion should be a fact rather than something you make a plan for. The press release outlines Arra has spent countless hours setting that goal, running The Nora Project's Storyteller Program in her classroom.

The Nora Project recounts: "She nurtured the voice of a local teen disability activist by allowing her to hone her message as a speaker in her classroom. She joined The Nora Project Board of Directors--the first and as-yet only The Nora Project educator to do so--where she's brought insight and expertise to our non-educator board members and staff that has helped shape the direction of our work."

Second-grade teacher Jennifer Garza explained that she could not think of anyone who deserves the Educator of the Year honor more than Arra. Garza cited Arra's dedication to teaching the values of The Nora Project in her classroom, including empathy, inclusion, and integrity.

"She not only inspires her students every day, but she is also an inspiration to teachers at Sears School," Garza said.

Arra explained that she was highly appreciative to accept the honor from The Nora Project, adding that the award was deeply impactful as it recognizes the work she has been doing to teach the core values of The Nora Project to students while also upholding the tenets of the *Portrait of a Sears Graduate*.

"I'm honored and humbled to be recognized among the hundreds of educators worldwide who are doing important work teaching the core values of The Nora Project, an organization I'm deeply committed to. Through The Nora Project, students learn that understanding and empathy should be the basis for all human interactions. We learn the importance of advocacy for inclusion and that disability is simply another form of diversity. My students learn there is no such thing as normal, and we are all very much more alike than different." Arra said.

Thanks to Departing School Board Members



Ms. Mia Casey Sachs, Mr. John Gottschall,
and Dr. Lisa Metzger-Mugg

Three Kenilworth School District No. 38 Board of Education members conclude their terms in April. Dr. Lisa Metzger-Mugg, Ms. Mia Casey Sachs, and Mr. John Gottschall have all contributed enormously, and their collective impact will be long-lasting. During their tenure, The Joseph Sears School underwent many transformative changes that set the foundation for realizing our new strategic plan centered on the *Portrait of a Sears Graduate*. Their contributions to our District and school are invaluable.

"These Board members, who I joined during their terms, were wonderful colleagues both to learn from and collaborate with," District 38 Board President Bill Graham said. "Every discussion and decision was uniformly student-centric. Both personally and for the community, thank you!" Graham said.

"I am so thankful for the work that Dr. Metzger-Mugg, Ms. Sachs, and Mr. Gotschall have completed during their board terms. The creation of the Master Facilities Plan and the passage of the strategic plan put the District in a terrific position moving forward. Your leadership and vision have definitely left a lasting impression," Superintendent Kate Donegan said.

The vacant seats on the District 38 Board will be filled by school community members Kate Tarbert, Lisa Graham, and Eric Hayes as a result of this month's elections. The Board of Education will reorganize at its April 26 meeting.

"I'm looking forward to working with Ms. Tarbert, Ms. Graham, and Mr. Hayes. A special thanks to the Kenilworth Citizens Advisory Committee for slating three exceptionally qualified individuals. Their collective expertise will help to continue the work of the strategic plan and *Portrait of a Sears Graduate*," Donegan said. Graham added, "We're excited to tap the talents of these three new Board members, all of whom are Sears parents for many years to come!"



THE JOSEPH SEARS SCHOOL

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PILLAR OF SEARS (CONTINUED)

"I will miss my little first-graders greeting me in the morning, telling me funny stories, drawing me pictures to hang in the room, giving me hugs, writing me notes," Rice said. However, she explained that what she will miss most about her students is their passion for school, love for learning, and excitement when they learn a new skill.

When asked about her retirement plans, Rice explained that adjusting her sleep schedule is one of her first challenges.

"Sears has been such a big part of my life. It's where I went every day for the last thirty-three years. I think, first and foremost, I need to learn to sleep past 5:00 a.m.," she said.

In addition to getting some rest, Rice added that she would take time to visit some family and travel outside the country. She will also dedicate herself more to gardening in the summer, reading, and taking walks with her dog, Charlie.

"I know I will get restless, so don't be surprised if you see my name on the substitute list," she said.

"I have had the privilege of teaching with Ann for many years. She is a dear colleague and friend. We have shared many of life's events together," third-grade teacher Toula Sideris said.

"Ann does not just impart knowledge and skills but inspires students to learn, encourages them to be curious, and nurtures their creativity. Ann plays a vital role in providing a safe and supportive learning environment. She has profoundly impacted the academic and personal lives of her students. Ann is a teacher who touches lives, and I wish her a well-deserved retirement," Sideris said.

Literacy Interventionist Emily Hayden described Rice as "the steady one," citing her dedication and devotion to The Joseph Sears School and adding that Rice has a work ethic that never quits.

"She learns about each student, knows what they need to be successful, and makes every effort to ensure they learn and grow.



I am so appreciative of her for the thoughtfulness she bears and the effort she makes to support our school," Principal Dr. Stephanie Helfand said, adding that Rice is a passionate educator who cares about her students.



Looking back at her career, Rice explained that she would tell her younger self to enjoy the teaching journey but to be prepared for all the challenges, the wonderful people you meet, and the students whose lives you will change.

"I would tell myself to make goals, attain them, and make more. Make sure you have a healthy balance between work and family, and enjoy every moment because it really goes fast! Lastly, have fun and laugh," Rice said.

"Teaching has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I treasure all of the life lessons it has taught me, and that is why it has been my one and only career choice," Rice said.