

This year's Jefferson City Public Schools Teacher of the Year followed in her mother's footsteps quite literally.

Sandra Allen earned the award two decades before her daughter, Rhonda Allen, and the mother-daughter pair have drawn lessons from each other to share with their students.

Sandra is retired from teaching after a 37-year career that started in 1972. She began teaching art at Blair Oaks High School, then moved on to St. Peter Interparish School for 15 years to teach fifth- and sixth-grade language arts. She then spent 21 years teaching elementary art for Jefferson City Public Schools.

"I was really happy, but I wasn't surprised, because she had been a teacher all of her life," Sandra said of her daughter's decision to become a teacher, too.

"She grew up in her bedroom. She was forever making bulletin boards and decorating the windows," she said. She said Rhonda wrote stories, recording them and music, too; she played trombone.

"She basically taught herself to read with those Little Golden Books and her little record player. I was really happy that she was realizing for the first time ever that that's what she wanted to do," Sandra said.

Rhonda has been a teacher at Thorpe Gordon Elementary School for 13 years, and she was at East Elementary School for two years before that — where she and her mom worked together.

Sandra said she helped her daughter build rapport with her students when she was a new teacher; they would eat lunch with Rhonda's students in the quiet environment of the art room.

Now that her mom is retired, Rhonda said, "She tries to stay away. It's OK, because she taught for 37 years, so she deserves it. But usually she's here about twice a year — at the beginning and during drama club, because she does all my sets, all the art stuff."

Sandra likes to come by and read to the children sometimes, too.

"Gives me a chance to get back in my element," Sandra said.

Both Allen women said they don't think too often about the likelihood of a mother and daughter being teachers at the same time — and at the same building.

"I think it really brought it home to me whenever I was named Teacher of the Year because how awesome is it that your mom was Teacher of the Year 20 years ago and that now I am because of everything she's taught me. So yeah, it's pretty special," Rhonda said.

Rhonda was named **Teacher of the Year** last month.

“It was a very bittersweet moment for us,” Sandra said. Her husband and Rhonda’s father, Tyronne Allen, and their son and Rhonda’s brother, Robert Paul Allen, both died last **year**.

Rhonda added: “We know that they had a hand in that because they’re our guardian angels.”

Both women said their ultimate reward as teachers is watching their students grow up and hopefully become **the** kind and conscientious citizens they help guide them to be.

Rhonda is a big superhero fan — Spiderman is her favorite, though she likes Batman, too — and her mom recently made Wonder Woman pillowcases for her classroom. Some **of the** superhero posters and art adorning her classroom’s walls have positive character traits written on them; **the** No. 1 quality she tries to impart to her students is “respectful.”

For Rhonda, there’s more to success in life than specific skill sets and job positions; she tries to impart being positive contributors to a community.

“You don’t have to be kind to somebody because it’s their birthday. It’s just OK to always be nice and do something nice for other people, and to me, if all **of** these kids in here could grow up and be that, then I’ve done my job.”

“And to know it’s good to do something for someone else and not get something in return, or what you get in return is not a material thing (but) a smile, a thank you, a pat on **the** back, or whatever, that feels good,” Sandra said. “We do everything we can, both **of** us, to build self-esteem, because if kids feel good about themselves, then their possibilities are limitless.”

Rhonda added: “I try to model that because I’ve been given such a good example through my parents. I’ve always been really cool with her. This is my home girl right here, even though sometimes she kind **of** drives me crazy.”

“She won’t let me believe that,” her mom laughed.

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