

DENISE (HAGEDORN) HEILERS

Balancing Life: Teaching, Coaching, and Raising a Family

Graduate: Class of 1985 Occupation: Teacher and Coach
By: Shelby Bettag, Spring 2011

When Denise Heilers is not teaching third graders at Ferdinand Elementary, she pursues her second job: leading the Forest Park Dance Team to state championships. Denise graduated with the class of 1985 from Forest Park High School. She decided to make her way into the teaching field after she volunteered as a cadet in a first grade classroom during her senior year. “All of the things that I loved about high school as a student, I could still be involved in as a teacher,” claims Denise.

Success for Denise came before her career as a teacher, though. She dedicated herself to her schoolwork, which led her to be the salutatorian of her class. Even though she kept busy by studying for school, Denise made time to excel in band and sporting events also. Denise was a well-rounded individual, winning back-to-back state band titles in 1981 and 1982. She also excelled as a member of the Forest Park girls' basketball team, winning two sectional titles during her high school days. The triumph did not stop there. Denise ran her way to track state, becoming a finalist in the 400-meter relay; she holds the record to this day.

Looking back on her high school days, Denise thoroughly enjoyed every minute of them. She felt that her teachers genuinely cared about her and wanted her to succeed. “When I went to college and attended class, I knew Forest Park had prepared me well.” Denise made some of her most memorable moments with her friends. She claims her high school girlfriends are still her best friends to this day. During their freshman year, they took a trip down to Florida, and Denise thoroughly enjoyed the journey: “There is nothing like Disney World with your girlfriends.”

After high school, Denise had her mind made up about how she wanted to pursue her future. She attended Indiana State University from 1985 to 1988. She received her Bachelors degree in elementary education and her Masters in elementary education administration and supervision.

Now working as an elementary school teacher at Ferdinand Elementary, Denise enjoys spending time with family and taking vacations with extended family members. During the majority of the school year, Denise arrives at work around 7:00 to organize her plans for the day. Once school dismisses at 3:00, she heads to Forest

Park for dance practice. “Coaching allows me to work with girls that become family, and there is nothing more rewarding than seeing their hard work pay off.” Denise has molded the members of the dance team into champions over the past years. As a coach, she has received six state championships at the varsity level and one junior high state title. She works hard and pushes herself to get the job done.

Denise has much advice to give to current high school students. She advises to make the most of your time at Forest Park because it will not last forever. She encourages students to challenge themselves and take classes that may seem a little difficult. “Get involved. Find something to really pour your heart and soul into, maybe a sport or club. You will truly make memories that last a lifetime.”