

~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

Married, and in high school

By John T. Miller



Grant and Liz Cusick on their wedding day at the Acalanes High School Performing Arts Center. Photo provided

By all accounts, sharing the same work place with your spouse seems to be a hit with a number of married couples who work together in the Acalanes Union High School District.

Leading the charge is Campolindo High School with four couples, while Acalanes has three married couples, and Miramonte and Las Lomas each have one.

While the convenience of carpooling together from the same house is appealing, in most cases differing schedules and childcare concerns often mean separate cars.

Many of the couples also admit they rarely see each other during the workday because they are in separate rooms teaching students.

Not all the couples were able to respond to the questionnaire.

Campolindo

Tom and Amanda Renno met while students at Campolindo, graduating with the class of 2000. Their teaching careers started right after college, and by 2006 they were both working at Campolindo. Tom currently teaches social studies, and Amanda – who had a five-year stint as an assistant vice principal at Acalanes before returning to Campo this year – teaches math.

They've cut back on extra-curricular activities due to having two young children, but previously Tom coached wrestling and was athletic director while Amanda was advisor for Mock Trial.

Stephanie and Paul Verbanzky met while in college at Claremont McKenna, but didn't start dating until he graduated – he was two years older – and came back to visit friends.

Stephanie teaches chemistry while Paul teaches AP U.S. history. They often can go outside the box with cross-curricular topics, such as the time Stephanie taught the Haber Bosch process in chemistry and Paul taught about the tragic life story of Fritz Haber and WWI poison gas.

The couple enjoys co-coordinating the AGATE program for the district, working with 30 juniors chosen for the districtwide honors program. The students work beyond the classroom with fieldwork, research, and project development.

Paul gets the most satisfaction from coaching the Academic Decathlon group. "All my decathletes get to know my wife and children and it allows for a

family atmosphere. We are very fortunate to work at the same school."

Jenna and Ryan Boyd are the most recently married and this is their first year working together at Campolindo.

Jenna teaches learning skills, while Ryan is a world history and psychology teacher.

A coworker introduced them to each other when Jenna was substitute teaching at her alma mater, Northgate High School, where Ryan taught before transferring to Campolindo.

Jamie and Jake Donahoe both teach in the English department, with Jamie also teaching drama.

Acalanes

Grant and Liz Cusick (nicknamed Mr. and Mrs. Q), are both Acalanes grads, but didn't meet until Liz started teaching English there in 1995. Grant had been the auto shop instructor since 1981.

Liz's father introduced the two, telling her that Mr. Q could "show her the ropes." They started dating in June, 1997, and in 2004 they were married in the Acalanes Performing Arts Center. Their wedding pictures were taken at AHS (a truly alumni event).

Although they don't have any children, Liz says, "We joke that we have 300 children every year. We've been to former students' weddings and baby showers, and have also helped out with many needy students we shared."

Ed Meehan and Natalie Moore met through a Northgate teacher friend, Meredith Tate (also noted in this article). Ed was a Northgate grad who had been a substitute there before getting his first job at a junior high. Natalie came to Northgate later to teach English. When Natalie did a Yoda voice one day, Meredith knew she would be a perfect match for Ed – a Star Wars junkie – and she introduced the two. They dated and eventually got serious.

Eventually, Meehan became the drama teacher at Northgate and five months later they were engaged. It surprised the students, because they thought they had just met!

In 2006 they both transferred to Acalanes. "Overall, we find it very positive to work at the same site," says Meehan, "but sometimes it's difficult to leave work at work and not spend too much time discussing issues."

Betsy and Tom McNamara, met for the first time at a foot-

ball game where they both were assigned to work. Betsy is an Instructional Assistant while Tom teaches Science.

They were both products of the Acalanes district, with Tom attending Campolindo and Betsy a graduate of Acalanes. She recalls one of her first conversations at a staff meeting when they were paired up for some exercises involving teen health. "That conversation jumpstarted our relationship," she said. "We learned that we had similar up-brings with the same moral values. From that conversation we built a working relationship."

It wasn't until they had worked together for five years that they started dating. Amy Bellomo, a coworker, got tired of watching her pine over the young science teacher and told her that if she didn't ask him out, she would do it for her. "Like we were in seventh grade," laughs Betsy.

She walked across the hall and entered a conversation he was having with a fellow teacher, asking him if he'd like to go out for a drink sometime. "The rest was history," she says.

Miramonte

Kristen and Mike Plant are longtime employees at Miramonte. Kristen runs the highly successful public speaking program, while Mike, a native of England, teaches math.

Las Lomas

Meredith Tate, after working in the Northgate English department where she received credit for playing matchmaker with Ed Meehan and Natalie Moore, moved to join the Las Lomas staff.

A short while later, Meehan takes at least partial credit for paying back the favor.

Shortly after Meehan accepted the job at Acalanes, he encouraged his good friend Taron Hensley – also a product of the Northgate drama program – to apply for the open drama position at Las Lomas.

After Meredith was divorced, she and Taron started dating and eventually got married. They are one of the few couples that team up in the classroom. Taron teaches drama, while Meredith teaches four sections of English and then joins Taron in the theater for stagecraft.

"I like to believe the series of events settled my debt to Meredith for introducing me to my wife," says Meehan. "Our students love the idea of our parallel relationships."

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