

Hays volunteer feels blessed by her work

By Ruth Campbell rcampbell@oaoa.com | Posted: Friday, June 21, 2019 12:15 am

If there is one thing VIPS volunteer Debbie McReynolds would tell people it's that they should volunteer because they'll never realize how much it will bless them until they do it.

McReynolds, who retired as director of utilities with the City of Odessa after 35 years, volunteers mainly at Hays STEAM Academy. STEAM stands for science, technology, engineering, art and math.

She has been giving of her time at Hays for a little more than three years.

"My sister up in the front is the school secretary, so I'd come up and help her in the office sometimes. One day she said I want to show you something and she brought me down to the science lab. The room was just stacked high with stuff. I thought, 'Wow. It's a shame to have this nice equipment and not know where any of it is.' Teachers don't have time to do that, to organize it all," McReynolds said.

So she asked if she could help and McReynolds was taken up on her offer.

McReynolds was recognized by the district as the winner of the Elementary Volunteer Program award for SharkFinder, along with Charles Kenimer. McReynolds also was the Individual Adult Volunteer Award winner at an elementary school.

"I got to organize the lab and get it all cleaned up for everybody. I had worked my way through college setting up and doing labs, so I knew it took a long time to do that ... so I kind of put the word out that I'd be glad to do that for the teachers and then I was able to start teaching some of the labs that the teachers specified that they needed. It's just been a blessing. My career has been science based ...," McReynolds said.

She started off with the city in the laboratory and undertook many different things. Director of utilities includes water treatment, wastewater treatment, distribution, collection pretreatment — "anything that has to do with water or regulation of water is what that was," McReynolds said.

Many times, she organized fourth-grade trips to tour the plant.

"The kids can actually see the actual process, which I think helps them understand what they're hearing through their teaching. That's the thing about labs is that it brings to life what you study in books and I think that helps to make it even more interesting for the kiddoes," McReynolds said.



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Outstanding Volunteer of the year Debbie McReynolds stands in the science room at Hays STEAM Academy.

She earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Texas Woman's University and went to work for the city. Through the city, she was able to go back for a master's degree in life science from the University of Texas Permian Basin.

Her volunteer work means she sometimes has to refresh her knowledge of science.

"I have to do my homework because some of this stuff I haven't studied since I was in school — grade school or high school. So it's been really neat to do that, get that background (and) get reacquainted with all of those other types of science. Science isn't just a one-note type of subject. It's many-faceted, so it's really been cool for me to re-learn a lot of things," McReynolds said.

She conducts a lot of labs with prekindergarten students.

"They just love it and I love doing it with them just to see that excitement and wonder that they have when they actually see science demonstrated to them. It's a blessing; it really is," McReynolds said.

Kathy Craighead, who is the school secretary at Hays and McReynolds' sister, is responsible for starting McReynolds down the volunteer path. And McReynolds said she is grateful.

She also volunteers at Second Baptist Church, the church she grew up in.

McReynolds said she is normally at Hays three or four days a week and does whatever needs to be done.

"It just depends upon what's needed. Although I do concentrate in here (in the lab), I also do office stuff. I took care of the office yesterday while they were taking care of other stuff," McReynolds said.

She added that she feels blessed to have won the volunteer of the year awards.

"When I see how hard these other volunteers work here, it's 'How in the world did I get singled out for that?' Honestly, so blessed is I guess the word I would use for it, that they would support me, the administration, the principal and the teachers, the (ECISD innovations department), all participated in making that happen. It just blessed my heart," McReynolds said.

"Volunteer. You just have no idea what the blessings are going to be that come out of it until you do it. We have junior VIPS here at our school and we're proud to have them here. They are already becoming involved in volunteering and (I) hope that they maintain it," she added.

Amy Lujan, the volunteer chairperson at Hays, said the campus volunteers like to give McReynolds a hard time about her awards.

"She outshined us a group. But it's very much deserved. We love Debbie so much," Lujan said.

McReynolds' sister also is an admirer as she nominated McReynolds along with the Innovation Department at ECISD for the recognitions.

"Debbie has a servant's heart like no one I've ever met. She needed something to do after retiring from the city and we're always needing help here at Hays, so she was available to meet the need and she has gone above and beyond to meet needs all over the building. We are blessed to have her," Craighead said.