

Multi-Talented Teachers

SGS faculty members bring a world of experiences into their classrooms

They have served as Peace Corp volunteers and United Nations Peacekeepers. Played for the Joffrey Ballet and the Stranglers of Bombay. Cooked soup for orphans and whipped up wedding cakes for brides.

Look inside Saint George's classrooms and you will find a group of talented teachers. Part of what makes them so good are the experiences and activities they bring to their work from outside the classroom.

Such as the wild ride that Middle and Upper School music teacher David Demand calls his "big gig." Two years as pianist for the Joffrey Ballet, performing 20 different ballets in glittering concert halls on both coasts and across Europe. "It was grueling," says David. "I was playing 12 hours a day, taking my own piano with me to hotel rooms to practice a lot of very challenging pieces. But I did get to work with some great children's choirs."

When life on the road lost its appeal, he settled in Spokane and played for Jeanne Hardie, current SGS Drama teacher and long-time Civic Theatre actress, in the first of her recurring roles as Mother Superior in Nunsense. Fast forward to 2005, and the two colleagues restaged that lighthearted play with Saint George's students.

In 2001, David added the roles of Artistic Director and Conductor of the Coeur d'Alene Symphony to his already busy schedule, building it into a professional orchestra. He's done something similar at the school, training award-winning choirs and accompanying multiple student musicals each year. "I push the orchestra to be at the top of their game, so my expectations of the students are high as well," he says. "And since I can pull in Coeur d'Alene Symphony players, our student musicals have an excellent pit orchestra."

If your musical taste inclines toward rock and roll instead of Rachmaninoff, look for Middle School history teacher Steve Gavin's band near the 6 Mile marker of Spokane's Bloomsday Race. The Stranglers of Bombay, named for a 1960's cult movie, also play local bars and festivals and plan a soon-to-be recorded album of original songs.

Steve's familiarity with dangerous foreigners dates back to 1989 when he joined the United Nations as "a blue-beanie peacekeeper, bouncing around Israel, Syria, and Egypt with a U.S. flag on my uniform," he says. "The Arabs were incredibly friendly and wanted to come to the U.S., but there was always an undercurrent of anger at us for supporting Israel." As personnel officer, he was responsible for housing officers from 42 different nations. "People go to the UN for adventure, and our family enjoyed some great dinners from all over the world." But after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Steve switched uniforms and joined the lead brigade in the 1st Infantry Division's end-run attack that ended the first Gulf War.

Local veterans from the current war in Iraq, including 5th-grade teacher Jennifer Smith's husband Scott, make their own end runs with the CVMA—Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association. "I had no idea there were so many motorcycle organizations in Spokane," she says. "You can do a different charity ride almost every weekend." Which is how Jennifer, who admits she was afraid of motorcycles, ended up riding on the back of Scott's Harley several times a month this past summer. "Now I'm thinking of taking a class to get my own motorcycle endorsement," she says.

One skill she has already mastered is cake decorating, after working for a bakery in college. "It's like 3-D edible art—it's beautiful and tastes good too," says Jennifer, who is an admitted Food Network addict.



David Demand coaxes beautiful music out of the Coeur d'Alene Symphony

"If I was going to do something other than teach, I'd make wedding cakes because it's such a fun job. Everyone is celebrating." Just ask her fellow 5th grade teacher Erika Mullins, who celebrated her own wedding with one of Jennifer's cakes!

Erika's own interests have focused on home construction, particularly since her family's cabin on Priest Lake burned down a year ago. "It was built by my grandparents in the late 1940s, and everything in it held memories," she says. When the family started rebuilding, they learned something about community. "Neighbors along the beach would pitch in, making it like an old fashioned barnraising," says Erika. "I saw so many blessings come out of this tragedy."

Upper School Math teacher Judson Ford also spends time remodeling his 1929 Craftsman home on the South Hill, but his real passion is for the Nordic Kids Program, offering lessons and fun each winter on Mt. Spokane's cross country skiing park. "We hold our own Winter Games, dividing the kids into country teams and competing in ski jumping and in chariot, slalom, and relay races," he says. Judson's own racing earned him 1st place in his age division at the 10K Langlauf Cross Country Ski event this year, and his wife, son, and daughter all finished high in their divisions. "It's like Bloomsday on skis, with skiers of all abilities," he says.

Another teacher at home on skis is Paul Clark, Lower School French teacher and member of the Mt. Spokane Ski Patrol. "I'm a CPR and toboggan instructor. Our certification is like EMT training for the outdoors," says Paul, who has seen his share of broken arms and concussions in eight years with the patrol. "It's lots of skiing and helping people."

In a warmer setting, Middle and Upper School Spanish teacher Nanne Abbey has led volunteer work crews to Guatemala the last few summers to treat children at an open air health clinic. "I like seeing the people I take down become more thankful for the blessings we have in our country,"

she says. Nanne arranged a visit to Spokane this fall by the director of the Guatemalan school that she serves with, and she hopes one of the teachers there will visit and assist the SGS Spanish department next fall.

Lower School Librarian Dianne Douthitt has her own Latin American connection. She has spent three spring breaks cooking for an orphanage full of kids in Tijuana, Mexico, while her own sons were building houses for desperately poor families nearby. Keeping everyone fed utilized her managerial skills developed from starting up and supervising 14 Great Clips for Hair salons in Spokane and Coeur d'Alene.

Dianne's counterpart Randy Bowley in the Middle/Upper School Library makes it his business to interest students in other parts of the world. At the school's International Day, Randy hosted tables for both the Czech Republic, where he was a Peace Corp volunteer and teacher, and for Lebanon, where he was librarian at the American Community School in Beirut. While there he took up an interest in scuba diving. "I was five minutes from the marina, and you could dive to wrecks in the Mediterranean. A World War II French Vichy sub sunk by the British Navy was just amazing to see," he says. "I've also dived in Hood Canal. There's more wildlife, but less visibility."

Equally wild but easier to see are the Men's Over 40 soccer games that Upper School Chemistry teacher Pete O'Brien enjoys. "We play virtually year-round except when there is snow on the ground," he says. "I'm a defender/midfielder, and we've been the top team in the league the past two years, despite all the fouls I commit." Pete also plays on a Men's Over 50 team. "It's strictly recreational and is pretty much played in slow motion."

From slow motion soccer to scuba diving to skiing on Mt. Spokane—whatever the speed or setting—Saint George's multi-talented teachers bring a wealth of outside experiences into everything they do.

—John Carter



Steve Gavin with his band on the Bloomsday course



Nanne Abbey with Guatemalan children by the clinic she supports



Judson Ford on Mt. Spokane for a Nordic Kids activity