

PBL teacher wins Golden Apple Award

■ Watson remains active after 50 years of teaching

By Will Brumleve

While most 76-year-old women spend their days enjoying retired life, Arcelia Watson stays busy — really busy.

So busy that most people her age, and even some half her age, don't do what she does on a daily basis.

From working out every day and watching her beloved Green Bay Packers on television to ushering at University of Illinois sporting events and traveling to Europe every summer, Watson is quite the active person.

Most remarkable, perhaps, is that after more than 50 years of teaching in the PBL School District, the senior citizen is still teaching eighth-grade reading and language arts at PBL Junior High School, and with no desire to retire any time soon.

That's certainly what PBL Junior High School Principal John Rawdin thinks. Rawdin nominated Watson recently for WICD-News Channel 15's bi-weekly Golden Apple Award, which recognizes outstanding teachers in the East-Central Illinois area.

Apparently WICD staff also think Watson is quite the exception, as they chose her for this week's award.

"Obviously, for Mrs. Watson, (we picked her due to) the fact that she had been teaching for so long, and because of what Principal Rawdin said about her (on his nomination form)," said WICD news anchor Aubrey Mika, who on Tuesday after-

noon visited the junior high to interview and acquire footage of Watson for the Golden Apple Award segment on Thursday's 6 p.m. news show.

"(Rawdin) said that she's very dedicated while a lot of teachers these days are kind of counting the days until they're finished teaching. He said (Watson is) here early and stays late, and he said (Watson has) kept up with the changing times."

"She's been (teaching in the school district) for 50 years, and she's here every day at a quarter 'till 7 (a.m.)," Rawdin said, regarding the nomination. "And I never have heard her even mention the words of retiring or having problems working with kids."

"When she's here, she's here with a smile and ready to do her service."

Watson nearly gave teaching up

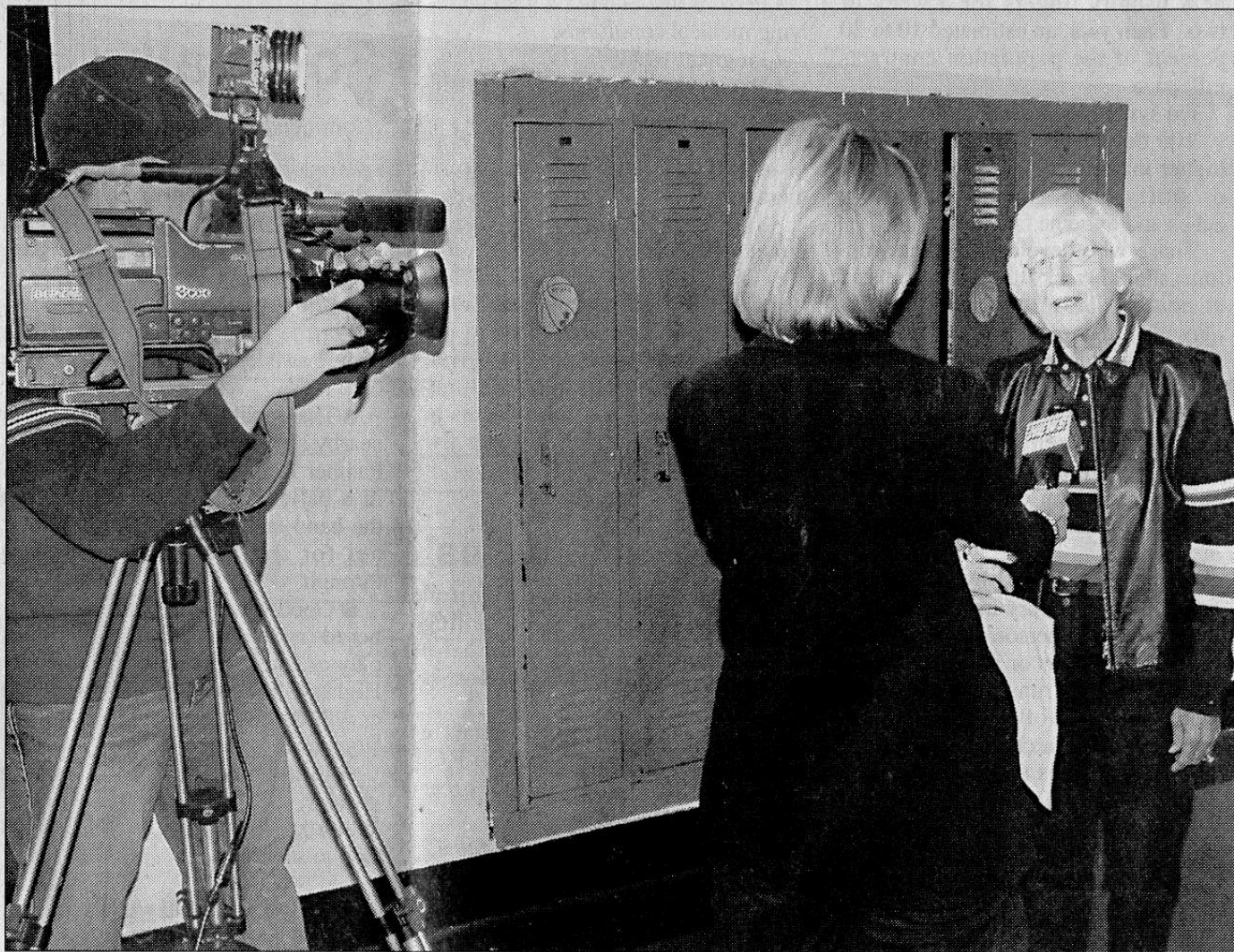
To think, Watson — the school district's senior-most teacher — almost gave up teaching entirely in the 1970s, when she briefly stopped teaching as the nation was introduced to widespread teen drug use. "The drug culture came in, and nobody knew what to do. I almost exited that year," she said.

If Watson didn't have experience working as an insurance saleswoman, she believes she might have quit the profession entirely. "When I sold insurance, (clients) said either 'Yes' or 'No,' but I was a respectful person (regardless). So I came back, and I demanded respect (from my students)."

"Now I'm known as a very strict and discipline-oriented teacher."

Watson, a life-long Rankin resident, began teaching in the early

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WICD news anchor Aubrey Mika interviews 76-year-old Arcelia Watson, the winner of this week's Golden Apple Award, on Tuesday afternoon at PBL Junior High School. Watson, an eighth-grade reading and language arts teacher, was chosen for the

bi-weekly award based on her 50-plus-year tenure in the school district. The always-active Watson will appear tonight on the Golden Apple Award segment of WICD's 6 p.m. news show.

Golden Apple

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1950s at East Lynn Township High School, located between Rankin and Hoopston. She taught four subjects at the school, which is no longer in existence.

Watson then began teaching at Paxton Community High School, before taking on a traveling teaching job for three years, during which she taught only half days in the PBL School District while taking care of her young daughter. Watson went back and forth between teaching fourth, sixth and eighth grades during that time.

Football

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against Iroquois West with eight solos. Dane Kief had six.

■ PBL's freshmen team scheduled a game with St. Joseph-Ogden Tuesday night and nobody came — from the visiting school due to a mix-up on the part of the Spartans. The game has been rescheduled for 6 p.m. Oct. 19.

■ There will be more in the air than nearby skydivers Friday night. Young Panther fans are invited to participate

She then came to the junior high, where she has been teaching for the past 39 years.

Watson said she doesn't plan on retiring any time soon.

"I don't even think about it," she said. "Some people say, 'My goal is to retire at age 50, but I've never really dwelled too much on the past or the future. I just take each day at a time and really try to enjoy each day.'"

So for now, Watson will continue to wake up at 4:23 every morning, get on the treadmill by 4:30 and spend the next hour jogging before heading off to school.

And no doubt, she'll continue to usher part-time at the University of Illinois' Assembly Hall and Memorial Field during basketball and football games, as well as concerts.

She'll keep taking four-week-long trips to Europe every summer and spend time with her two children — Dennis Watson, of Terre Haute, Ind.; and Susan Allen, of Milford — and five grandchildren.

And she'll keep watching and attending Nascar and Formula-One racing events.

"I do a lot of stuff. I have a great life. I love it."