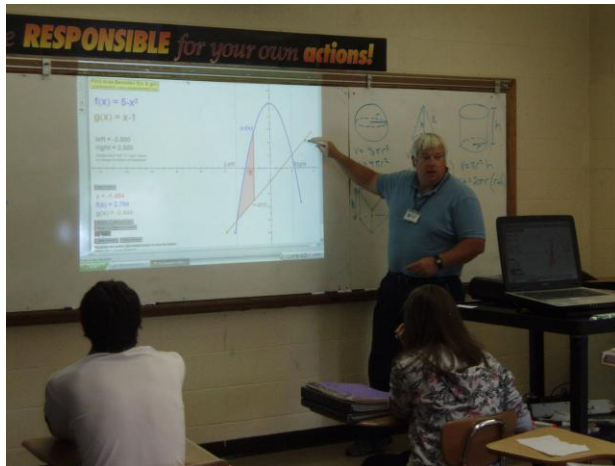


Retired Lt. Col. USAF Receives Greatest Salute as a High School Teacher



Chris Headlee has received many salutes throughout his career as a Lieutenant Colonel with the United States Air Force. And at age 51 he has seen a thing or two.

A self-proclaimed 'Air Force Brat' himself, Headlee "got fed up with the politics and the rat race of the DC area" and moved back down to Southwestern Virginia so he could be closer to family members living in Smyth, Wythe and Grayson counties.

What would a former Lieutenant Colonel, former Air Force Academy Calculus, Statistics and Differential Equation Instructor, and former Scientific Analyst-Systems Engineer for Aerospace Corp. do in Wytheville beside raising goats, coaching 8th grade football and JV softball and the sort? Ask the rest of his family living in the area, his neighbors in Wytheville, or any student at Marion Senior High School just 25 miles due south, and they will most likely be able to tell you.

Even though Chris Headlee was by no means inexperienced at teaching, his Masters Degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (1985) in Operations Research and Statistics qualified him to teach at the Air Force Academy, but not in the Virginia Public School System. He knew he loved working with kids from that experience so moving back to his family roots in Southwestern Virginia and teaching in the public school system was the next item on Headlee's agenda.

While looking at the Troops for Teachers program he came across the EducateVA program online and took action. "EducateVA gave me good information from experienced teachers so going into the public schools I knew it would be much different than teaching students on the college level. At the academy the students were very driven," explained Headlee.

Teaching kids who are not motivated perhaps will always be a challenge for Headlee, but working with kids in the classroom and on the playing fields is his greatest reward.

Headlee began teaching Geometry 8-12 in the fall of 2005 at Marion Senior High School. He has added a new course each year picking up Dual Credit Statistics and AP Calculus at the senior level. One of

those special rewards happened just last year in his second year of teaching with a Special Ed senior. “This student had a real intense desire to succeed which appealed to me,” explained Headlee. After spending 10 or 15 minutes after school every day with this student, he was able to pass Geometry and graduate with his class. “He saw me at the graduation ceremonies and kept introducing me to people.”

Sometimes it is the things people don't say that say the most. But in a different manner, the retired Lt. Col. now High School Teacher received yet another salute from a student. “A graduate last year wrote a long thank you note and that also was very rewarding.”

Headlee's advice, if you're thinking about switching careers to teach public school? “You have to love what you do, headaches, pay, hours and all, but the golden moments are extremely precious.”

Thanks to Headlee the students of Marion Senior High School have received some extremely precious moments, also.

Changing careers is becoming a trend for many baby boomers, though the trend remains for teacher shortages even as Virginia's Community Colleges strive to place more and more Career Switcher teachers into public school systems via their fast-track teacher licensure program, EducateVA.

This partnership began at the request of the Virginia Department of Education in 2004, based on the VCC's 40-year track record of educational excellence and its proven ability to provide high quality accessible programs across the state of Virginia.

EducateVA is a hybrid program using a combination of online and onsite instruction and allowing candidates with a bachelor's degree and five years of work experience to receive their teaching license within sixteen weeks, all while maintaining their current job and responsibilities.

The program has helped hundreds of teachers to become employed in school divisions across Virginia, and this academic year alone 135 individuals will obtain initial teaching licenses in the critical shortage areas of English as a Second Language, English, Foreign Language, Mathematics and Science at the middle or high school and secondary levels.

For a complete list of critical teacher shortage areas contact your public school system or visit the Virginia Department of Education website at www.doe.virginia.gov. For more information regarding Virginia's Community Colleges Career Switcher Program visit a nearby community college or www.EducateVA.com.