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**Gregory-Portland Independent School District**

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## **G-P Intermediate School Principal Letty Villa Retires after a 40-Year Career serving G-PISD**

“Back in college, all I wanted to do was work for Gregory-Portland ISD,” said Letty Villa, reminiscing about her 40-year career with the school district. Villa interviewed for a teaching position with the district while a student at Texas A&I University in Kingsville (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville) and recalls being hired on the spot — a beginning that led to what she says has been a “lifetime of joy” serving students. “Working in a school, you get to be a part of others’ lives. You get to help someone every day ... what could be better than that?”

G-PISD Superintendent Dr. Paul Clore agrees. “We are in the business of helping students become well educated, successful adults who make a positive difference in our community and the world beyond our doors. Mrs. Villa is a leader who always keeps that in mind. Her service to this school district and the impact she’s had on our students cannot be measured.”

Villa was first hired as an English teacher at Gregory-Portland Junior High School in 1978. She became a Counselor at Stephen F. Austin Elementary School in 1985, and served in that role while also supporting Special Education students as a Diagnostician. Two years later, she began serving in the same capacity at G-P Junior High School. In 1993, she was named Assistant Principal of the Gregory-Portland Intermediate School, and was promoted to Principal of the campus in 2001.

In every job position, Villa said she has been thankful for the privilege of reaching people in a meaningful way. She recalls being a teacher with an average of 7 or 8 students in her classroom every day after school, always wanting to talk about something happening in their lives. “I’m not sure why, but they always wanted to visit with me. Now I see so many (former) students who remember things I had long forgotten. They’re always asking if I still drive my old Corvette (a gold Stingray), or sharing something I did or said years ago that I never realized stuck with them.”

One example was a student who recently found Villa on social media. She recalled a story shared during an English class about one of Villa’s college classmates who suffered from depression. “The boy in the story was an outsider, but also an excellent writer. I was shocked that my (former student) remembered this story and it has made a difference for her after so many years. I shared a work of literature he wrote about himself with my class as an example that everyone has a talent even if it’s not obvious. Everyone has a purpose.”

For Villa, her purpose has been to serve middle-school-aged students.

“People say ‘wow, it must be hard to work with that age group,’” she said. “But they are awesome. You just have to understand that if they act a certain way, something else is usually causing that. You have to commit yourself to seeing beyond the surface, and take the time to get to know them. If you can’t do that, you’re in the wrong business.”

Building those relationships with students is essential for academic success, Villa said. When asked about her teaching and administrative experience, she was quick to cite mutual trust and respect as a necessary foundation to student learning. “A student doesn’t care about anything until they know



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## Principal Letty Villa to Retire

that *you* care. I truly believe that you have to earn their trust and they have to earn yours. With that, everything else falls into place.”

Much to her surprise, Villa said she had been nervous with her last day approaching on January 31<sup>st</sup>. She spent years looking forward to the opportunity to retire. “I never imagined the feeling I am getting about leaving. I can’t believe it’s this difficult for me. But I guess it makes sense because I absolutely love my students and staff. I feel like I am losing a family, a big part of me.”

Thankfully, however, the opportunity to help will never be lost.

“I have already agreed to help with summer school this year, so I am looking forward to that – I just love the kids. I can’t be away for too long.”

Villa has been serving the district during summer school for many years. She said she looks forward to it, and believes that G-PISD students have an advantage because of the high standards set by the district. “We don’t settle for less than what we know they can do. Excuses don’t work because we believe so much in our students. We give them every opportunity, and every bit of support we can to help them become all they can be.”

Villa said she hopes every student remembers the G-P Intermediate School motto, which states: *“I may not be the best at all things, but at all things I will do my best.”*

When during another busy day her thoughts turned to retirement, Villa said she knew it would be hard to make the change. But she will move forward with that motto at heart, just as she expects her students to do the same. “I will do my best to support G-PISD and every student I’ve ever known, as well as every G-P Wildcat I will meet in the years ahead,” she said.

“There is no better way to spend your life than to help children. No better way.”

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