

Hebron Resident Bringing Creativity to the Classroom

by Geeta Schrayter

For Hebron resident Susan Lattanzi Roser, creativity is key in both her personal and professional life. As a Responsive Classroom consultant, Roser works to bring creativity into the classroom setting – and has recently published a new book on how to do just that.

“I’m all about incorporating the arts into teaching and helping teachers know that children don’t have to sit at desks all day long,” Roser said Tuesday.

Responsive Classroom is a research-based approach to teaching that, according to responsiveclassroom.org, “increases academic achievement, decreases problem behaviors, improves social skills and leads to more high-quality instruction.” The approach uses various classroom practices with such names as “Interactive Modeling,” “Guided Discovery,” “Collaborative Problem Solving” and “Morning Meetings,” and is based on the view that children learn better when they have both academic and social-emotional skills.

For the past 14 years, Roser has worked as a consulting teacher for the company. She trains teachers in the Responsive Classroom approach and said she “helps transform schools into development-appropriate learning environments with a joyful classroom where children are challenged and excited to learn.”

And in her latest book, *80 Morning Meeting Ideas for Grades K-2*, Roser shows how teachers can make that happen utilizing morning meetings – which Roser writes are “a fun, friendly, and powerful way to get each day off to a great start,” it’s explained in the book. “These 20- to 30-minute daily whole-group gatherings help create community and reinforce academic and social skills in lively ways.”

When the morning meeting is used consistently, “a safe, joyful community is created,” said Roser. “Teachers who have never done it, then do it, see a significant change in a positive way.”

There are four components to a morning meeting: greeting, sharing, a group activity and a morning message. In her book, ideas for 20

of each component are included, along with “practical tips and variations” to help teachers plan a successful meeting.

Roser said it’s her hope and dream that eventually, every classroom starts its day with a morning meeting – even if it’s only 10 minutes long.

“I love them so much,” she said, adding she even utilizes the idea with adults at formal business meetings and at the start of her meetings with the education committee at Church of the Holy Family.

“I think if there was a safe community built within our adult settings we’d get a lot further, faster,” she said – and morning meetings can help accomplish that.

In classroom settings, the benefits of the meetings include, Roser explained, “the consistency of it for students, the fact that students basic needs of belonging, significance and fun are met in the first 20 minutes every single day, that it’s varied, that children get to know everybody in the class not just their best friend, that teachers are a part of the meeting” and that academics can be incorporated as well.

Copies of *80 Morning Meeting Ideas for Grades K-2* – along with those of Roser’s first book *Energizers! 88 Quick Movement Activities That Refresh and Refocus K-6* – sold at responsiveclassroom.org and such bookseller sites as amazon.com. The book is selling well, Roser said, and added, “I’m thrilled about that.”

The writing of *Energizers!*, which came out in 2009, was initiated by Roser after teachers continuously asked her to put together a book with “the wonderful songs and chants” taught as part of the Responsive Classroom approach. Then, after the first book became successful, the company behind it, Northeast Foundation for Children Inc., asked her to write another one, leading to *80 Morning Minutes*.

Before working with Responsive Classroom, Roser held such positions as master teacher of the kindergarten program with the University of Connecticut Child Development Laboratories and a multi-age classroom teacher at the

Regional Multicultural Magnet School in New London.

It was at the latter that she was first introduced – and made the transition – to Responsive Classroom.

“Our school, like many schools, was taking on Responsive Classroom and was looking for trainers within the building,” said Roser. She volunteered to be one such trainer, and through that experience and the feedback she received she realized “people wanted to learn from me.”

And so, Roser let Responsive Classroom know she was interested in the program, and they told her to consider being a consultant – which she did.

“I found I thoroughly enjoyed it and my positive impact would reach thousands rather than just those in the classroom,” she said.

Roser now visits schools all over the country teaching the approach; in rural and suburban settings, at high-poverty, private and charter schools. During the summer, she also travels for various workshops and conferences. This year, her summer stops include Washington D.C., Maine, Connecticut and New York, where she was situated this week and had the role of lead presenter.

“I feel really lucky to see so many different educational settings and work with teachers,” she said.

When she isn’t working, Roser spends time at home with her family, where creativity is similarly fostered. Although her two sons are currently in Hebron schools, they were previously enrolled in a Montessori school. Both boys play instruments along with their parents, and as a family the Rosers enjoy hosting exchange students, owning and exercising sled dogs, and are “nature people” who like to bird watch. Roser added she has “a very exciting family life.”

“We’re all about being creative and playful and inventive together,” she said, just like at work.

Moving forward professionally, Roser said she’ll probably take a year off from writing.

“But I have a couple ideas for my next book,”



Resident Susan Roser has written a new book on Responsive Classroom, a research-based approach to teaching.

she added, saying she had started to take notes on one that would examine how to take the Common Core Standards and incorporate the arts into them “in a manageable, creative way so students can express themselves and achieve their learning.”

Until then, Roser will continue to focus on teaching the Responsive Classroom approach – something she said she finds very rewarding, particularly because it makes a difference.

“What’s most rewarding for me is knowing I’m making a positive impact across the nation for elementary teachers – [by helping them] to incorporate movement, creativity [and] development appropriate teaching practices.” Additionally, Roser said she liked that teachers are open to the approach “and that they’re excited about it.”

To learn more about Responsive Classroom or Roser’s books, visit responsiveclassroom.org.