

# Teacher follows mentor's path

**By Lisa Harlow**

*Special to The Review*

Donna Schisler, a kindergarten teacher at Mother Seton School in Emmitsburg, fondly remembers her own days as a student at the school, in particular her time spent with her first-grade teacher and mentor Mary Jo Burkell. These days, Schisler doesn't have to go far to seek advice from her mentor — the two literally work side by side, as Burkell teaches in the Pre-K classroom right next door. Their story is part of The Catholic Review's ongoing series on teachers and their mentors.

While Schisler as a first-grader enjoyed her school day — especially handwriting when Burkell would let the students get messy and use shaving cream on their desks — it was the time after the bell rang that she relished.

"My most memorable moments with Mrs. Burkell were the times that I was able to help her after school," said Schisler, who often stayed after school with her mother, Terry Smith, who was and still is the school's secretary. She fondly recalls hanging up student work and helping decorate the classroom. When she was older, she helped Burkell correct papers and get things ready for the next day.

"She loved helping out, and this started at a very early age, in first grade. She continued helping me throughout her entire elementary school experience at Mother Seton," said Burkell, who has been teaching at Mother Seton for 20 years. "We had a lot of fun, and I have many good, positive memories of those years."

After she graduated from Mother Seton, Schisler attended a public high school, so she would have days off that Mother Seton did not. "I would come back and volunteer on those days, and I believe that is when I decided that I wanted to be a teacher," she said. "It was those times that Mrs. Burkell would allow me to work

with the students and I loved it.”

“I also loved watching her teach,” she added. “She had such a love of teaching and it showed with every lesson. It was also great to see how much the students loved her and respected her. She always treated her students with kindness and love.”

Schisler, 26, who graduated from Mount St. Mary’s University in 2007, is in her fifth year teaching at Mother Seton, and she strives to treat her students just as Burkell does.

“Mrs. Burkell loved all of us in our class no matter how difficult we may have been on certain days,” she said. “She gave each of us a chance to be ourselves, but also guided us to be better students and individuals. She made learning fun and enjoyable, and I try each day to pass that experience on to my students as well.”

Burkell was not surprised that Schisler ended up teaching at Mother Seton.

“Donna always told me from the time that she was very young that she wanted to teach at Mother Seton School,” she said. “I am very proud of Donna. She is a very hard worker, and – other than the fact that she reminds me of just how old I am starting to be – I am able to reflect on her life journey and witness how a very young person, with hard work and perseverance, has turned into a fine young woman, wife, professional colleague and just a very fine person.”

“I would like to believe that I influenced her, but credit must also be given to her mother and father, along with the many Daughters of Charity who taught at Mother Seton along with other teachers and staff,” Burkell said.

And while Schisler still considers Burkell her mentor and often asks for her advice, she adds, “I now see our relationship as a friendship. She is still a wonderful teacher and I love working so closely with her.”