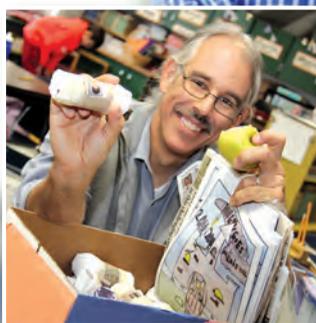


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# SERVICE CITIZENSHIP RESPECT



PHOTOS: BECKY MILLER

By Leslie Fottrell  
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The end of the school day is a busy time for some of Christopher W. Albrecht's fourth-grade students at the Fred W. Hill School in Monroe County. Codie, Micah, Moses and Cash huddle briefly around a white plastic tub filled with small stuffed animals. They consult a list, agree on a zoned-delivery approach and then zip around their respective quadrants, dropping an animal onto each student's desk. The animals wear tags, fastened with yarn, that tell students how to begin tomorrow's school day. Codie drops a red bear wearing the tag, "Round Table," onto a desk.

"These are my students who need extra help with homework," says Albrecht, who teaches English language arts, science and technology. Albrecht is the 2018 New York State Teacher of the Year.

The after-school students call themselves the Freezer Pop Club because Albrecht provides the frozen treats for the twice weekly meetings.

With the class set up for tomorrow, the boys assemble at the round table, choose their pops and dive into homework. Micah takes a careful bite of his icy pop. "I like it," he says. "It's fun and you get your homework done."

They work on their ELA assignments with great focus and intensity despite, or perhaps partly because

of, the freezer pops. Albrecht, too, is completely focused on assisting the students collectively and individually as they work on their writing using colored pens. His method of teaching incorporates writing units by well-known author and teacher Lucy Calkins, the 6+1 Traits of Writing — ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation — and Albrecht's own colorful creativity.

Students use five different colored pens, each with a unique function. For instance, students add similes to a penciled draft with green pens, correct typos with red pens and use blue pens to replace ordinary words such as "ate," with more descriptive ones, like "devoured."

"He was sleeping," Codie reads

and pauses, deep in thought, blue pen ready.

Albrecht prompts: "Codie was sleeping. Codie was ..."  
"Snoring?" Codie offers.

"Yes," Albrecht answers. "We can infer that he is sleeping and you've got a sound along with it. That's a smart answer."

The next morning, thanks to the animal tags, all students go to their first station, but no one stays put for long. By 9:45 a.m., they have moved seven times, rotating effortlessly between full class learning, and small group instruction at the round table, on the carpet in the front of the room or at their own desks.

All the while, Albrecht reinforces good behavior, kindness and citizenship, wherever he is, whatever the lesson. "That was very kind. That's good leadership," he says to a student who

■ Left: Stuffed bears help students determine how to begin each school day.

**2018 Teacher of the Year instills positive values into learning**





LESLIE FOTTRILL

helps another with work.

This, perhaps, is his most valuable quality. The constant side dialogue carefully interwoven throughout the day, like a silver thread in an elaborate learning tapestry, adds a subliminal richness to his lessons, and in interactions with students, colleagues and the parent helpers he welcomes into his classroom.

Albrecht praises good choices in scholarship, leadership and compassion; prompts students to do the same with their classmates; models good behavior; corrects inappropriate words or deeds; and sometimes just offers life advice.

"I feel like it's not what you teach, but how you teach it," he says. "I want to teach core values that will prepare students for the future, so they can learn to prepare and adapt."

NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene T. DiBrango says it is Albrecht's emphasis on respect that "is so important in creating a safe and inspiring environment for students to learn and to thrive."

Albrecht has an abundant repertoire to entice students to love learning. He teaches science in a white lab coat. He uses a singing bowl and deep breathing to promote a calm and peaceful learning environment. And, "he's funny. Sometimes he'll say, 'It's about to get crazy in here!'" says Parker, heading to the rug for a group lesson.

Three students volunteer to act out a few lines of narrative so the others can watch and record the descriptive elements that make a story come to life. Albrecht becomes a director,

encouraging them to exaggerate facial expressions so the class can see and describe an eyebrow jutting upward in surprise, or a mouth curled downward with disdain.

"Great! Now get to work adding description," Albrecht tells the class. "Remember, good writing gets into your head, and it gets into your heart."

Several former students who now work as journalists credit Albrecht's passionate instruction as the impetus for their career choice.

Samantha Spagnola, a high school senior and former student who interns in his classroom several afternoons a week, admits she still uses colored pens and says Albrecht inspired her to pursue teaching.

In his 20 years at Hill Elementary, Albrecht has mentored 11 student teachers, more than 20 student observers and six high school interns.

"He is so helpful, supportive and encouraging," said Brittny Emery, Albrecht's current student teacher. "Very early on he made me feel part of the team in the classroom."

Albrecht meets with incoming student teachers in the summer, motivating them via email and phone calls. "I hope to impart joy and love for the profession," he says.

That's not the only work he does in the summer. After Albrecht receives his class list, he begins to handcraft personalized pencil holders for each student. It takes many steps, from cutting the wood and drilling the holes, to burning each student's first name with a pyrography pen into the holder and then sanding and staining the wood. The

Left: Albrecht offers after-school homework help to students who call themselves the Freezer Pop Club.

pencil holders are as useful as they are adorable and, when pressed, Albrecht estimates he spends about a half hour making each one. It is certainly time well spent. The pencil holders become treasured talismans of learning and of Albrecht's lasting impact on former students.

"I still have my pencil holder," Spagnola beams.

"I am surrounded by excellence," says Albrecht. "I have been blessed with Amy Stoker, my teaching partner of 20 years. Likewise, classroom aide, Lisa Kennedy has been with us for 10 years. Sharing the responsibility of educating children with two people who I think the world of is a dream come true."

Albrecht works hard in his classroom to inspire all his students.

"Chris feels that his day doesn't end when the school day ends," says Principal Brandon Broughton. "He makes himself available in the evening to answer homework questions," by phone and in person.

Albrecht hosts monthly after-school movie parties for students who complete their book packet requirements, eats his lunch with students in the classroom, and has recess with his students. He is the yearbook adviser and an announcer at district basketball games.

He credits his wife, Jennifer, who he said handles most of the home responsibilities in addition to having a full-time job, which allows him to spend the extra time he needs for lesson plans, mentoring student teachers, after-school assignments and community service. "I married my high school sweetheart," Albrecht says. "She's amazing, understanding and supportive. I'm very lucky."

## Community service a hallmark for Brockport teacher

Christopher W. Albrecht emphasizes the values of community service and citizenship to his fourth-graders, yet his actions speak louder than words.

Albrecht, 2018 NYS Teacher of the Year, is a trustee of the Western Monroe Historical Society in Brockport, which maintains the Morgan-Manning House. Built in 1854, the house was privately owned until a tragic fire in 1964 claimed the life of the last member of the Morgan family to live there. The society fully restored the house.

"It's a crowning jewel of Brockport," says Albrecht, a member of the Brockport Teachers' Association, led by Orlando Benzan.

Brockport TA members help clean up and maintain the grounds of the house, Benzan says. Albrecht also ensures, "there are opportunities for his students to get involved and learn about the history of our community."

NYSUT President Andy Pallotta says making community involvement an integral part of education encourages good citizenship. "It's wonderful to see the connection between students, the Brockport community and the Brockport TA."

Albrecht's teaching is all about those connections. He and Jane, a fourth-grader who loves the sciences, began researching Monroe County's Lewis Swift, a well-known 19th century astronomer. In January, with Albrecht's help, Jane and three other Brockport students made an in-costume, multimedia presentation at the Morgan-Manning House. "Star Struck in Brockport —

Lewis Swift, The Man Who Looked Up" merged science and history into the account of Swift's stellar accomplishments. Last year, in honor of the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage, Albrecht guided a group of students to research Brockport resident and celebrated author Mary Jane Holmes.

