

LeeAnne Pettey

By Sabrina Buettner

Effective communication skills are essential for teachers in relating to students and parents, especially when those students have special needs. Teachers can deepen these connections, building trust and respect, when a teacher understands that communication is more than just exchanging information. It involves understanding and listening in a way that makes someone feel heard and understood. Such was the case with LeeAnne Pettey.



Looking you in the eye, with a smile on her face, and an extension of her right hand, the first words always heard from LeeAnne Pettey upon meeting her were, “Hello, I’m LeeAnne Pettey.” Parents were immediately at ease with these simple words, even in the most difficult of situations. Mrs. Pettey was a master of handling difficult and challenging conversations with students and adults. You knew after a few minutes of talking with her that she would do the best she could to seek a good resolution to whatever it was that was being discussed, and in doing so, it would be reasonable and fair.

LeeAnne Pettey graduated from Athens State University with a bachelor’s degree in special education. She also has a master’s degree in collaborative teaching from Alabama A&M and a master’s degree in Educational Leadership and Administration from Alabama A&M.

Pettey began her career in education after working eleven years at BP Amoco. She left to pursue her passion, special education. Mrs. Pettey’s first year of teaching was at Cedar Ridge Middle School, in Decatur, Alabama. Before arriving at Hartselle Junior High School in 1997, Pettey was the Director of Operation Home, an emergency shelter for abused and neglected children, and a foster parent for Morgan County Department of Human Resources.

At HJHS, she taught 6th, 7th, and 8th grade special education with a concentration in social studies. Eventually Pettey became a reading specialist, the Transition Administrator at Hartselle High School, and the system wide Special Education Coordinator for Hartselle City Schools. Each promotion ensured Pettey the opportunity to shape programs designed for special-needs students. As a result, Mrs. Pettey’s influence had a lasting impact on students and the teachers who worked under her guidance. Anna Summerford shared, “Mrs. Pettey was always eager to help in any way and patient with me if I was struggling. Her impact on my life was tremendous. She instilled in me the will to never give up.”



Kristi Wood, parent to Krislyn Wood, explains that Pettey offered to help tutor her child because there wasn't a program specifically designed for her daughter's needs. "Mrs. Pettey did not give up on my child ... When she finished working with our daughter, she was on grade level and her self-confidence was restored. She taught our daughter to work hard." Krislyn adds, "Due to someone investing in me, I have been able to achieve wonderful things."

Always thinking of ways to include special needs students in school activities, Pettey began a Signs of Courage ensemble at HJHS. Students learned sign language to interpret the words of patriotic songs during the Veterans Day Program. It was a very moving tribute for local veterans from such a special group of students.

One of Pettey's most successful efforts was implementing the Tiger Buddies Club at the high school. Matching a typical student with a special-needs student, Tiger Buddies would take their special-needs friends to after school extracurricular events. The Tiger Buddies Club and the interaction it brought to the school body, contributed in a major way to the social dynamic of Hartselle High School. James Horner, one of Mrs. Pettey's former students, said that Tiger Buddies involved "wonderful fun events with friends."

Pettey has also been recognized as Teacher of the Year in 2000 for ARC of Morgan County, Teacher of the Year in 2004 for Morgan County VFW, and Advocate of the Year in 2012 for the Governor's Council on Employment of Individuals with Disabilities.

Spanning several years, Pettey volunteered for Shining Stars, a sports league for individuals with disabilities; Tim Tebow Night to Shine, a prom for people with disabilities; as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) by Cullman County Department of Human Resources who care for abused and neglected children and families that have been separated; and CAST for Kids Tournament at Smith Lake for children with special needs.

Pettey and her husband, David, have two grown children and two grandchildren. She and her husband now reside in Bremen, Alabama.

For her many years of service, the Hall of Fame is honored to accept LeeAnne Pettey as a member in the Class of 2024. Like numerous former students, Cheyenne Stapleton refers to Pettey as her teacher, mentor, and loving friend who assisted her throughout her school years. "She ... guided me and put me on the road to independence...Giving her this honor is so appropriate for her efforts and ideals."

