

THE SHOOFLY MAGAZINE

Serving Bay St. Louis and Waveland on the Mississippi Gulf Coast

Andy Parker: Dedicated to Education

On the Shoofly - November 2020

When its right, they say, you know it. And Andy Parker knew that his path included a satisfying career shaping education on the Gulf Coast.



Parker: "My favorite thing about the Bay is its people."

When Andy Parker was at Jones County Junior College, he walked out of his Accounting II class with clarity: regardless of his previous plans, he couldn't see spending the rest of his life analyzing financial wins and losses or creating financial reports.

"My gut told me it wasn't what I was supposed to be doing," Parker recalled.

Instead, he looked to his English teacher, Lona Bassett, for insights into how to live a happy life that would leave him feeling both fulfilled and proud of his work.

"Ms. Bassett always seemed so happy and had authentic relationships with her students," he recalled of his sophomore English teacher. "I just remember looking at her and thinking I wanted to be like her – wanted to share that love of literature and writing."

Parker said he has never regretted his decision – and has relished the twists and turns his professional life has taken.

He went on to earn degrees in English and education from Mississippi State University. He later taught at Stone High School in Wiggins and at Gulfport High School.

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He especially treasures one experience at Gulfport High, where he taught a group of students who had repeated multiple grades but been promoted to the high school together because of their age. “Many of them were 17 or older and in English I,” he recalled.

One day when he was ill, he broke with his usual classroom protocols and asked students to take turns reading a piece of literature aloud. A student wrote him a note at the end of class, asking him not to ask her to read aloud again, because she was embarrassed and didn’t want other students to mock her.

“That ‘Dear Andy Letter’ propelled me to learn more about how kids learn to read,” he said. “I really started to study it – to try to figure out what more we could do to help.”

Parker said he talked with the student years later and learned she went on to graduate and now is a manager at a local business on the coast.

“She told me she is writing her own book and that she has more than 300 books in her home,” Parker said. “It was amazing to reconnect and learn of her success that after all those years – rewarding is an understatement.”

His first leadership role was assistant principal at Bayou View Junior High in Gulfport. That role was a tough one.

“I struggled to adjust, honestly,” he said. “People think when you are the leader of a school you have so much more autonomy, but I felt the opposite. That first year, I was shocked by how much control I *didn’t* have. I had to process the different work schedule and learn how to deal with things like teachers who didn’t meet the expectations I had had for myself in the classroom.”

He went on to work in the Pascagoula Gautier School District at Gautier High School, where he was a high school assistant principal for two years and then moved to Gautier Middle School to serve as principal for five years. After Hurricane Katrina he served as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction.

In 2008, he began working in Bay St. Louis as high school principal.

“High school really is my love,” he said. I’m really proud of the work I led at Bay High. The community has become my second home.”

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In 2013, Parker retired from the Mississippi public education system and went to work for a national nonprofit focused on helping struggling schools shift to new national expectations around curriculum and teaching.

He later served as chief school officer and co-CEO for a charter school group in New Orleans.



A year ago, he came to Bailey Education Group, where he serves as Director of Professional Learning and Leadership Development. The company is Mississippi's premiere educational consulting company, providing a variety of services, including teacher and leadership coaching and development. Right now, the company is also working to provide support to teachers and schools trying to plan for COVID-related changes this fall.

"I came to Bailey because I knew I wanted to be part of a team that was committed to growing students and improving lives," he said. "I knew it was also a place where my talents would be utilized and where I could grow."

Parker has worked on a number of projects at Bailey, including in Bay St. Louis, Moss Point and Laurel, as well as some in Louisiana.

Some of his favorite days at work allow him to help support Bailey staff and also spend time in schools with principals, teachers and students.

"I have learned enough about myself to know I thrive on connections with people," said Parker, who supports Bailey's internal professional learning and also does extensive leadership and teacher coaching in schools.

"I am thankful I left the accounting classroom that day and made the switch to education. I'm lucky enough to have a career that I never dreaded going to each day," Parker said. "I'm grateful for all I've learned, the people I have met and the experiences that I've had. Becoming a teacher and school leader was a life-changing decision for me."

Parker, and his husband, Ranzy Monet, are part time residents of Bay St. Louis, and they spend the rest of their time in New Orleans. "We bought a house just off of Main Street in BSL as our retirement place; currently we are there part-time and in New Orleans the other part," commented Parker. "Our hearts, though, look for reasons to get back as often as possible."



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“It’s hard to pick one thing I love about Bay St Louis... Of course, I love the Bay High Tigers, walking along the beach front, eating at the fabulous restaurants, shopping in all of the quaint stores and galleries, and riding my golf cart all over town,” furthered Parker.

“However, my favorite thing about the Bay is its people. We love sitting on our front porch talking to neighbors and strangers who pass by, having friends over for meals and conversation, and enjoying cocktails with them by the pool. The Bay certainly has become our ‘Place Apart.’”