

## Principal of The Year

“Thanks-you’re a lifesaver!” How many times have you said that in gratitude for a favor? When they say it about Warwick Neck Elementary School Principal, Patricia Cousineau, they really mean it! When Patricia noticed early one school morning that a teacher’s car was not in the lot and had not called out sick, she was immediately worried. She jumped in her car and raced to the home of her Grade 5 teacher. Seeing a car in the driveway but no signs of activity, she promptly dialled 911. While waiting for the ambulance she spotted an upper floor window accessible by the lower roof. She immediately climbed up, broke the window, and made her way to the teacher. It turns out the teacher was suffering from a very high grade fever and would have been permanently impaired if not for Principal Cousineau’s fast thinking! That is just one example of how well Patricia knows her staff and anticipates their needs.

Parents and community members raved about Mrs. Cousineau stating that she is “kind, focused, and always there for a conversation”. Heather Rodriguez, former Warwick Neck Elementary School parent, recalled a time when a microburst storm created chaos at dismissal time at the school. She complimented Mrs. Cousineau’s responsiveness to the situation and noted that Mrs. Cousineau stood outside helping to direct cars, busses and children during the dismissal. Through the pouring rain she held an umbrella, but not for herself, for her students. She noted that “this is her home; this is her baby.” City Councilman, Edward Ladouceur, said that “Mrs. Cousineau’s first priority is school safety and that she was instrumental in changing the traffic pattern of the school’s parking lot as well as adding a crossing guard to Rocky Point Avenue.

Warwick School Committee President, Karen Bachus, said that Patricia Cousineau is “fair, firm, and consistent.” Community member Bill Connors simply said, “she’s infectious” and “inspiring.” Students told the panel that Mrs. Cousineau and the teachers at Warwick Neck “make learning fun.” One student remarked that “we feel safe all time time.” When asked about student safety, even Mrs. Cousineau referred to herself as “Safety Sally.” Mrs. Cousineau wants her students to remember their time at Warwick Neck as fun.

Ms. Cousineau’s colleagues look to her as a mentor and a strong leader within the Warwick Public School system. Denise Bilodeau, Coordinator of Blended Learning, stated that “I love collaborating with her. She is one of the first ones that will try anything new.” A fellow Warwick Elementary Public School principal describes Mrs. Cousineau as having the perfect balance of “intelligence and emotional quotient.” All members of the school community have enjoyed years of a very special Veteran’s Day Celebration event planned by Mrs. Cousineau that includes songs, poems and letters. Students in grades 3-5 participate among hundreds of viewers in this event at The Warwick Neck Lighthouse.

Patricia herself is a very humble person. According to her school community, Patricia has “never forgotten what it was like to be a teacher.” She began in Warwick as a 3rd Grade Teacher at

Lippitt School and later decided that she wanted to share her passion with not only the 25 students in her classroom, but for the “greater good.” In her interview, Patricia opened with the remark: “None of this is about me. I work with “hardworking, good people.” However, the initiatives that she stands behind and her school community see her differently. From art therapy for homeless students to yoga and Responsive Classroom techniques, Mrs. Cousineau is always willing to work beside people and share with her colleagues and families. She admits to being a lifelong learner and continues to grow, learn, and teach with her work as a Fuse Fellow with the Highlander Institute.

In summary, Patricia admits that she tries to treat every child like her own grown daughters. “The kids are still the best part of my day.”