

The Arnold Sentinel

“Serving the South Loup River Valley”

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New Year, New Teacher

Tonya Welch signs contract bringing full music program back to APS



New Arnold Public Schools music director Tonya Welch leads freshman band members in practice Friday of last week. Welch started the position right after the holiday break, after the school had gone a year-and-a-half with no contracted instructor. - Debbie Connelly photo

By Janet Larreau

The sound of band practice filled the halls of Arnold Schools last week, as new music instructor Tonya Welch took charge of the music program. Her contract was approved at a special board meeting held on December 21, leaving everyone to breathe a sigh of relief after a year-and-a-half of receiving no applications for the open position.

“We are thankful we were able to find someone. It’s a key time to find an instructor as far as getting our younger kids introduced and going into band,” said Superintendent Joel Morgan, who has been keeping the program going when time permitted.

This is Mrs. Welch’s 13th year of teaching. She holds a bachelors in Music Education, majoring in percussion and vocal performance, and

continued her education, completing her masters in Education with an emphasis in early childhood education.

She spent two years teaching preschool in Imperial before moving to Curtis and teaching Pre-K through 12th grade music in Maywood for four years. She and husband Donnie’s relocation to Arnold in 2017 ended her time in Maywood and she worked as a substitute teacher in Arnold, Callaway, Stapleton, and Anselmo-Merna for two years before taking the grades 5-12 instrumental director position in Gothenburg. After two years there, the job description changed to 5-12 instrumental, 9-12 vocal and kindergarten music, which is what she has been doing up until now.

After some challenging years in Gothenburg due to the job description change and an excessive workload, Mrs. Welch

found herself facing burnout. She had considered the Arnold position multiple times over the last two years but said she was just too scared to make the change. This time, when the opportunity presented itself, she took the plunge.

“I am so excited to be teaching music full-time in Arnold and to be back in the K-12 music setting!” she said. “I have always loved Arnold Public Schools and the Arnold community. Subbing there for two years allowed me to get to know the staff and students, and I have always enjoyed my time in the building. We also attend St. Agnes Catholic Church in Arnold, and our family has been involved in the Western Riders 4-H club, so Arnold has always truly been home since we came here.

“I was absolutely elated to get the job offer and even more excited that

things fell into place making it possible for me to start right away. From the second I accepted the position, I have felt so welcomed and appreciated and have been given so much support from the administrators, my colleagues, and students. It has been a fresh breath of air that has renewed my confidence and energy, and I am looking forward to a great semester and future here in Arnold.”

This semester, Mrs. Welch said her goal is to just get kids even more excited about music and to build relationships with them.

“Being able to establish a positive environment where students can have fun making music together is the foundation of a program, so we are going to work on that foundation,” she said. “Mr. Morgan deserves huge kudos for his work in keeping music alive for the students and putting on some

really awesome programs. Arnold is so incredibly lucky to have such wonderful administrators who value all aspects of education and truly work toward doing what’s best for all students.

“Ultimately, the importance of a strong music program lies in its ability to enrich the lives of students in countless ways. It provides a unique platform for learning, growing, and connecting, contributing to the development of well-rounded individuals who can thrive in a diverse and challenging world. Its benefits extend far beyond simply learning to play an instrument or sing a song. By nurturing creativity, cognitive skills, and social-emotional well-being, music can bring students together and prepare them for success, not only in academics, but also in life! Musical skills and abilities never leave a person; it’s something they

“I don’t think there would be another superintendent in the whole state that would do that.”

- Arnold School District President Duane Bowers, commenting on Superintendent Joel Morgan’s willingness to keep the music program going until a teacher was hired.

can continue to do their entire lives.”

With public school districts across the nation struggling to fill open teaching positions, Arnold School Board President Duane Bowers said the board is thankful to have found a music teacher.

“We are kind of fortunate that we could find one that could start right in January. If Joel wouldn’t have stepped in, the kids wouldn’t have had any music. I don’t think that there would be another superintendent in the whole state that would do that. The whole board was very appreciative, and Joel did a great job with what little time he could step in there. He put on awesome programs.”

Mrs. Welch and husband Donnie live south of Arnold. Together, they have three children: Jaden, 14; Karson, 8; and Kaysen, 2, plus Mrs. Welch’s two bonus daughters, Tristin, 15, and Jayden Lee, 14, who spend time with them on breaks and over the summer.



Committee Is Capturing The Voice of Local Historians

Fourth in a series on the Arnold Area Historical Museum project.

As the old saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” but only an oral recording can truly capture the voice, memories, and perspective of those who have history with our Arnold area. Everyone’s experiences are unique and from the very beginning, the goal of the museum committee has been to preserve the firsthand remembrances that specifically tell the story of Arnold.

As a result, when the Arnold Area Historical Museum (AAHM) committee first formed, and fundraising had begun, one of the first purchases made was equipment,

including a computer, software, printer, and recording gear. The latter is being used to capture interviews with local historians. A small committee has been working diligently in this area and has already completed several recordings.

Two of the interviews have been with Arnold’s oldest resident Mildred Smith, who turned 102 in August of 2023, and 91-year-old Betty Cole. Mildred came to Arnold with her parents as a little girl, and Betty is a life-long resident. She spoke about her parents, who settled here in 1909. Mildred was a teacher at Yucca Valley School, and interestingly enough, taught Betty in the third grade.



Arnold Area Historical Museum committee members Carolyn Watkins and Barb Peterson capture an interview on video with life-long resident Betty Cole in December 2023. This was one of several interviews that have been completed with local historians and more are scheduled. With her usual sense of humor, Betty joked, “I’m the last living member of my family, so I can tell it any way I want to without being corrected.” - Debbie Connelly photo

These residents were interviewed in their homes by Carolyn Watkins and Barb Peterson, who ran the video equipment. They listened, as Mildred and Betty talked about their personal life experiences and major historical events in their lifetime. Both women were happy to have someone come into their home and visit for a while.

“They had the ability to spell it out. They had looked over the questions and had answers for everything. They were both delightful and had so much information about their past. It was a wonderful experience for both

Barb and I,” said Carolyn. “There’s still a long list of people yet to ask and then record,” said AAHM President Renee Bubak. “Jason Wehnes is our ‘techy guy,’ putting recordings onto the computer and backing up files. Our website is coming along. We need to get a few more key pieces in place before we can go live, and even then, it will be a work in progress. I know those whose family members have completed recordings are anxious to have the website going so they can watch the interviews.”

If anyone has special memories of Arnold, rec-

ollections of key events or organizations in the town’s history, ways of life, or funny stories, the committee is interested, and they ask you to reach out. Some people are also being interviewed from out of town, so distance is not a factor.

“Sadly, there are many residents who are deceased that we missed the opportunity to gather their stories. However, we know that many of their stories were shared with their families and can still be shared. A great example of this is an interview with Karolyn Duponcheel in which she shared memories passed

on by her mother, Doris Bowers,” said Renee.

Contact Renee Bubak at 308-870-3214 or e-mail arnoldareahistoricalmuseum@gmail.com. Additionally, if there is a community member who is interested in assisting with these oral history recordings, the committee would welcome the extra help.

The fifth part of this series will focused on how the committee is progressing on the collection of historical information and items for the future museum.