

Meet Mr. Larson

P.E. instructor is 'best job in the building' Larson says

By Heather Lilienthal

As soon as the music starts, the bodies start to move. They run, they jump, they even sing like rock stars and clamor around like crabs. It looks a lot like controlled chaos, and Chad Larson is comfortable overseeing it all.

Larson is the physical education instructor at Northeast Elementary School, a position he's held for a few years.

"I taught in the classroom for nine years before making the change to P.E.," he says. "Now it's all high-octane energy all of the time.

"I was used to dealing with 27 students in one classroom," Larson says. "Now I have every class in the building. Learning names is the biggest challenge, especially when you have 13 Taylors. It was a big change, needless to say. "It's the best job in the building," he says. "There's no doubt about that."

At Northeast, Larson works with students from kindergartners to fifth graders and fulfills the physical education needs of every level, working with each class for 30 minutes once or twice a week.

"I wish we could have P.E. every day," he says.

For the kindergartners, he focuses mostly on "getting them to run around the gym without running into each other." He laughs again. "Seriously, we work on that.

"We just finished fitness testing with the fourth and fifth graders, where we test their flexibility, push ups, sit ups and running the mile, things like that," he says. The testing is done in the fall and in the spring.

"They tend to worry about it sometimes, but it's a good way to show them how they can improve during the year. This fall testing gives us a baseline to chart their improvement."



Chad Larson, Northeast Elementary School physical education instructor, demonstrates an exercise. Photo by Heather Lilienthal

Students who excel will be honored with a Presidential Fitness Award in the spring.

Larson knows that physical education is a big deal, and he strives to teach the kids skills that they can use later in life, such as learning the rules and techniques for various sports. But, above all, he really wants to instill in them a love for movement. And it's all about selling the activity with a huge dose of fun.

"The music is constantly playing in here," he says. They are doing a team marathon today that requires the teams of four kids to accomplish a laundry list of activities, from hula hooping to running a lap around the gym.

"We also play Star Wars tag, using swimming noodles as light sabers, and there is a fun Escape from Alcatraz game where we turn out the lights and I prowl around with a flashlight as the warden," he says

In addition to building healthy bodies, Larson's students are also developing pride. His classes love the annual Jump Rope for Heart program where the kids raise money and then jump rope to earn their donations.

"The kids are amazing with that program," says Larson. "And I don't really push it on them. They take it and run with it."

Larson says the students raise about \$11,000 on average each year, and Northeast Elementary is one of the top 100 schools in the nation, according to the American Heart Association.

"They really feel it's a civic duty of sorts when it comes to that program," says Larson. **AL**

First Church of Christ is bursting at the seams

Growth has been tempered by space limitations



Photos by Jason Hancock



By Jason Hancock

First Church of Christ has 170 members and is out of room. Serving the church are, from left: Doug Lucas, minister to seniors; David Nassiff, senior minister, and Jacob Taylor, minister to youth.

First Church of Christ's sanctuary is bursting at the seams, and its senior minister, David Nassiff, couldn't be happier.

"We are tapped for space," he says. "That's exciting, because that means we are attracting new people to our church. Right now we have 170 members, and we are completely out of room."

The church has started a "vision team," Nassiff says, to begin the process of planning for expansion. But there are no immediate plans to expand.

"We know it's coming, though," he says. "We haven't quite kept up with the growth of the community around us, and that's because we just don't have space to do it."

Nassiff says the church's belief system is very simple: "The Bible is the written word of God, and we must follow it as law." But even though that belief has been in place since the church was founded 39 years ago, he wouldn't call First Church of Christ a "traditional" church.

"We have what is called a 'blended' service," he says. "We have traditional and contemporary songs. We have a band. It's something for everyone."

That is important, Nassiff says, as church should be a place where many different generations come together to worship.

And while Ankeny has grown with the

addition of many young families moving into the city, Nassiff says his church has hired a part-time pastor just to minister to seniors.

"Of course we like to see younger families join the church, but we don't want to neglect the ones who have been with us for many years," he says. "We still have a few charter members who still come regularly."

The church also has a vibrant youth ministry, Nassiff said, including a teen worship service from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. every Sunday night.

"That has become very popular," he says.

Nassiff should know about putting together a successful youth program. He has been with the church 16 years, and 13 of those were spent as the youth minister.

Nassiff and his wife, Tamara, moved to Ankeny in November of 1991 from a ministry in Florida. After six different senior ministers came and went during his tenure, Nassiff said he answered God's calling and stepped into the position in June 2005.

One of the aspects Nassiff says he hopes to improve about the church is its community outreach program.

"We do a lot of things, but not enough," he says. "I think that is very important for us as a congregation to be involved in the community around us, to try to do what God has called on us to do." **AL**

What do you like to in P.E. class?



Sydnee Greiman — "P.E. is my most favorite special because we do a lot of fun stuff."



Makenna Junge — "During P.E. we get to run around a lot and check our heart rates."



Morgan Gjerde — "I love to climb our new rock wall and play fun games and run around in P.E."



Nathan Key — "I love to run, and I love to play Star Wars tag in P.E."

First Church of Christ
Address: 310 N.W. Ash Drive, Ankeny
Phone: 964-0146
Web site: www.firstchurchankeny.org
E-mail: first.staff@juno.com

Schedule:
Sunday
Fellowship Cafe - 8:30 a.m.
Sunday School - 9 a.m.

Celebration Service - 10 a.m.
Junior Church - 10:30 a.m.
Children's Church - 10 a.m.
Teen Worship - 6:30 p.m.
Wednesday - September to May
Youth Groups - 6:30 p.m.
Adult Study - 7 p.m.
Ladies' Bible Study - 7 p.m.
Thursday
Adult Study - 7 p.m. (every other week)