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CLAYTON / HENRY THURSDAY • October 11, 2001

## KENDRICK MIDDLE SCHOOL: Jonesboro principal a live wire on education scene

Thursday, October 11, 2001

Dan Ray has been variously described as "hyper," "bubbly" and "enthusiastic," adjectives frequently applied to precocious, if slightly irritating 8-year-olds.

Ray doesn't mind. He accepts them all, including his most prevalent appellation, which is "Mr. Emotion in Motion."

Named principal at Kendrick Middle School in June, he'd barely tacked up the office photos before launching WKMS-FM. Never mind if WKMS, 100.1 on your radio dial, doesn't reach 35 states (broadcast range is within 1/2 mile of the Jonesboro school), or if current programming is limited to a handful of recorded announcements.

Everybody has to start someplace, and no one doubts Mr. Emotion in Motion when he says, "I'm fired up. When our students learn what we have here, we can go on the air live, play music, have talk shows, do advertising --- their only limit will be their imagination."

Ray has had few boundaries in his own career. He grew up in Nashville, attending Belmont University where he majored in math and history. In a teaching career that began in 1982, he's been assistant principal (1998-2001 at Kendrick), a math teacher for 16 years, and he's coached tennis, football and boys and girls basketball.

He was a teacher at McDonough's Eagle's Landing Christian Academy (1994-96), after spending 12 years at Riverdale High. It was there he coached basketball under the legendary Ken Ross who's won more than 600 games in 34 years.

"What did I learn under coach Ross?" said Ray, repeating a question "I learned that he has 34 years worth of stories and I've heard every one of them."

All kidding aside, Ray still retains a hooplful of memorabilia relating to his coaching days. He has a miniature basket and net leaning from his office closet; he has a pebbly-grained basketball-shaped coffee mug, and a basketball mouse pad for his computer.

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In one sense these symbolize the teamwork-based structures and disciplines that are bedrock to his philosophy.

"I want an orderly school, not a chaotic school," Ray said. "I want to function as a group. That means, as principal, I must be visible to the student body, to the teachers, to the community. That's a far cry from when I was growing up, and the principal stayed holed away in his office. But nowadays, the principal should be one of the first people the kids see in the morning. That doesn't mean I'm out trying to win votes --- it means that I'm showing a visible presence."

Ray's exuberance and dexterous people skills are a perfect fit for Kendrick's sundry student body. The middle school, which opened in 1996, has 1,400 students. Seventy-five percent of students are African American, 15 percent Caucasian and 10 percent Asian or Hispanic.

Kendrick feeds high schools covering a wide swath --- or what Ray calls the "Nike stripe" --- of territory. Although technically in Jonesboro, over half its students will attend Riverdale High, a quarter of them will go to Mount Zion, and only 15 percent to Jonesboro High.

"The main thing we're going after this year," Ray said, "is that we want to see the reading skills increase. I think there was a time, especially when I was in high school, when reading was de-emphasized. But the pendulum has swung back. We now know that reading not only improves a child's writing, it ties into better social studies and science skills, among others. Good reading skills raise test scores all across the board."

Kendrick will be one of nine Clayton schools piloting the Georgia School Council, a seven-member board consisting of two parents, two teachers, two community leaders and Ray. An outgrowth of House Bill 1187, the council's general aims are to improve and encourage student performance.

But Kendrick will be the only Southside school with a radio station, and only one of five in metro Atlanta. It's too early to predict the success of this and other fledgling ventures Ray has up his sleeve, but for those living within a 1/2 mile of the school, stay tuned.

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