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ROTTERDAM

History teacher finds meaningful work in classro

Editor's Note: This is part of a series spotlighting teachers from around the Capital Region.

BY MICHAEL GOOT
Gazette Reporter

Draper Middle School history teacher Fred Saccocio credits his career path to listening to the radio one day in 1986.

He happened to hear a report about the teacher of the year, who spoke about how important the profession is.

At the time, Saccocio had a job selling billboard advertising and was not satisfied. One of his friends who is a teacher at Mohonasen arranged for him to visit the school. Saccocio became more interested in switching professions and went back to school to get certified and then student-taught for a year at Mohonasen under seventh-grade teacher Bill Gold. His career change was official.

"I obviously love the classroom. I like the energy that I feel in here. This is meaningful. The job I had before is not. I like the connection I have with kids," he said.

Saccocio, 45, earned his master's degree at the College of St. Rose

and taught at Schenectady Christian School for two years beginning in the fall of 1991 before returning to Mohonasen.

Saccocio, who teaches eighth-grade history, said he enjoys interacting with the students and teachers both in and out of the classroom. Both frequently drop into his classroom during the free periods and they eat lunch in his room — as some did during this interview.

He particularly likes getting to know the students. "A lot of kids are just really cool. They're fun and funny and smart. I like being around them."

The day zips by for him. Mohonasen has block scheduling. Classes are 80 minutes and Saccocio has two or three classes per day. Because the periods are that long, Saccocio says he has to mix up his teaching style. He likes using his interactive "smart board" to play audio and visual clips from the historical period being studied. Technology has been a huge leap forward, he said.

"When I started here, they still had film strip projectors, tape players. It's hilarious," he said.

Mohonasen has done a good job keeping pace and even setting the

pace in technology in education.

"A lot of people who teach social studies don't have what I have," he said.

He also asks rapid-fire questions of students to review material. "I want them to be participating. This is a good confidence builder. I think they like when they're firing answers back at me."

Students seem to be receptive to his teaching style.

"He really helps us understand the material we're learning," said 14-year-old Michael Redmond. He doesn't move on until everyone in the class understands it."

Amber DeAngelo, 14, said she likes that Saccocio is hands on with his lesson plans and shows pictures and other multimedia to help show what the time period was really like.

Saccocio's day often does not end at the last bell because he also does tutoring after school. He said he enjoys it because he can spend time with a child one on one.

When he is not at school, Saccocio spends time with his wife Sheri and his three children Zack, 17, Hannah, 15 and Madeline, 13, at their home in Rotterdam. He used to coach soccer at the modified

level but stopped because his kids are playing in the Schalmont School District and wanted to be able to watch their games. He still works with some teams on speed and agility coaching.

He doesn't have a lot of time for too many other activities outside of the classroom.

"I'm just busy. I hang out with these guys a lot," he said.

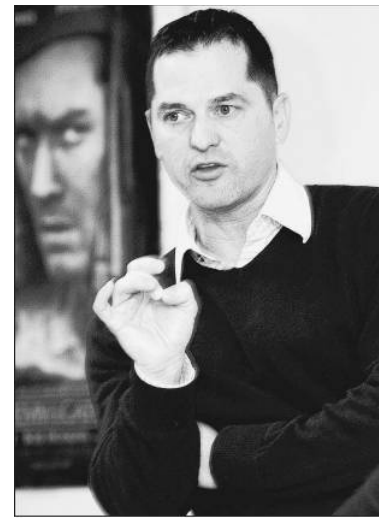
Students are always facing challenges, Saccocio said. Some are facing challenges in their home life, whether it be broken families or a parent losing a job. His task as a teacher is a way to work through those challenges. He said he has yet to have a student that couldn't learn.

"If you really care about them, if they know you do ... they respond."

Saccocio says teaching is a great life and he would encourage anybody to go into the profession, despite a tight job market.

"Don't let anybody talk you out of it," he said. "It is a wonderful way of making a living."

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MARC SCHULTZ/GAZETTE
Draper Middle School teacher Fred Saccocio is a 20 and popular history teacher.