



By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Former students of Chase County Schools fourth grade teacher Gary Patch still come up to him and reminisce about their favorite activity. “Are you still reading the Great Brain series? Did you do a play on the Oregon Trail?”

Even if they’re out of college and beyond, they still retain memories of the Fudge stories.

Patch, who will retire the end of this school year, had his students read the books, then write and act in a play about the books. Parents crowded the classroom to see the productions.

He still has the books, but hasn’t produced the plays for a few years because of the school’s switch to the Reading Mastery program.

Patch was born in Colorado Springs, Colo., but spent most of his growing years living in the Sandhills. He graduated from Mullen High School, then obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from Doane College in 1974.

His job upon graduation was to teach fourth grade for seven years in Ord.

Patch then managed a Wendy’s in Fremont for two years. He compared it to teaching. “You had kids working for you, you made lesson plans, and you had to be prepared” for whatever happened that day.

In 1983 Patch was hired by the then Imperial Grade School to teach fourth grade, and has been in that grade 29 years.

Along the way he obtained a Masters Degree in elementary instruction in 2005.

He has also been a coach, in some sports for 16-18 years. In his first year of teaching at IGS he coached junior high football, junior high wrestling, high school wrestling and junior high track.

Patch decided to drop coaching four years ago to prepare for the Reading Mastery program.

His best experiences as a teacher were “The books I’ve taught kids with, the plays and the activities the kids really remember.”

It’s challenging being a teacher. Patch said he’s made sure he’s been organized and ready for the “day to day things.”

The last several years he hasn’t taken much work home at night, but before that he used to spend at least one weekend day at school in addition to the school days.

In his 36 years of teaching, Patch said technology is definitely one of the biggest changes because everything happens so quickly.

He said he’s also seen more stress in teaching students for taking tests. “Not that we didn’t do that before, but the tests seem more difficult than they used to be. Children are required to know more.”

Patch said it’s now time to kick back and relax. He plans to do a lot more hunting and fishing.

There are also travel plans, involving wife Sharon, their two children and three grandchildren.

“It seems like 29 years have gone awfully fast,” he commented.