



For the last 10 years, Katy school namesake Sharon Rhoads has built up students with carefully crafted and personal messages

Written by Tonya Ellis | Photography by Layla Zakaria

Sharon Rhoads, namesake of Jack and Sharon Rhoads Elementary School, weaves her way through the cafeteria, little, pink notes in hand. Kids quietly raise their hands when Rhoads nears their table. They want her to sit by them.

For the past 10 years, the retired Katy ISD art teacher has made weekly visits to the children, passing out special love notes. Rhoads' inspiring notes have become a tradition at the school. "I go around from table to table, write them notes, and get to know them," she says. "I write about 50 a week."

Building up Students
Each slip of paper has the
words "A note from Mrs.
Rhoads," printed on the
top, along with a positive,
handwritten, message she pens
while with the student. Rhoads
also likes to add a special post

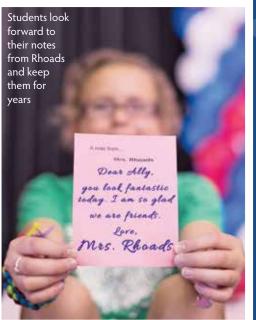
script on the bottom.

She writes the notes to build the kids' self-esteem. "Maybe you got a bad grade, or your mama told you to clean up your room and you didn't do it well," she explains. "You look at the note and feel better about yourself."

Rhoads knows most of the kids, but makes sure to script special messages for new students, like, "Welcome to Rhoads Elementary. You're going to be a great Rocket."



Students hold onto the notes for years. "Their mothers tell me that they keep them," Rhoads says with a smile. "They have little albums they keep them in."



At a recent 10-year anniversary celebration at Rhoads Elementary, former students actually brought in notes they had kept. "There was one high school boy who came back and said, 'I have every note you ever gave me," shares Rhoads.

Encouraging Others
Her notes don't stop with the children. "There's almost never a week that goes by that she doesn't leave a note encouraging me," says Rhoads Elementary principal, Carrie Lowery. "She leaves notes for staff members as well. Her whole mission here is just to encourage kids and encourage us."

Lowery's connection to Mrs. Rhoads spans decades. "Mrs. Rhoads was my elementary art

teacher. As a fifth-grader at Hutsell, one of the first things I got was a note from Mrs. Rhoads," she recalls.

Leaving Notes

The love notes continue a ritual Mrs. Rhoads and her late husband Jack Rhoads shared. "I never came home and there was not a note left for me on the counter," she recalls.

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"It could say, 'I love you. I'll be home late tonight,' anything really. He just always left me a note. I have a few notes from when we were courting at SMU."

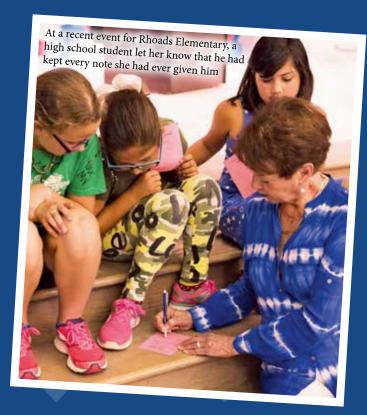
Rhoads and her husband continued the note-writing tradition with their children, Jennifer and Jason, when they were growing up.

Sweet Blessings

Rhoads' husband Jack, who passed away in 2000, was a Katy native and served as athletic director at Katy High School for 29 years. Rhoads was especially touched when the school board named the elementary school after them when it opened 10 years ago. "That was a reward I never expected; it was a true blessing," she says.

In addition to volunteering at the elementary school, Rhoads is on the board of Keep Katy Beautiful. The staff at Rhoads Elementary feel that with her special love notes, she's definitely doing her part.

"I just think it's really sweet," says Rachel Camacho, office clerk at Rhoads. "It makes them feel very special, and not all children get that." KM





TONYA ELLIS enjoys writing feature stories, and spending time with her husband and three children.



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