

Meet the Shafers

Career educators and school namesakes, Fred and Patti Shafer, are investing in the lives of students

Written by Gail Collins

Photography by Anetrius Wallace

Independently, Fred and Patti Shafer drove positive forces in education over their careers, which made them a clear choice when choosing a namesake for Katy ISD Elementary 35, now known as Shafer Elementary School.

The Shafers agree that it was an incredible honor that they never expected. The couple was waiting at the airport to fly to New York City and celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary when they received the call from then Superintendent Alton Frailey that they had been selected as namesakes. The feeling of disbelief of being nominated to represent one of the most recognized school districts in the state lasted for hours.

Advocates for Education

Fred's desire to help others began in high school and found an outlet in education. His first job after graduate school at the Region III Education Center followed the 1975 enactment of Public Law 94-142, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. Fred knocked on doors in hopes of identifying special needs children and many parents wept at the prospect of new educational means. The opportunity to provide a more direct impact came in 2000 when he was named as executive director for Special Education, Counseling and Psychological Services in Katy ISD.

Under his leadership, the district's Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities earned Texas Education Agency's Promising Practice in 2005 and 2006. The Behavior Transition Programs for students with several emotional and behavioral difficulties was also established, as well as research-based programs for children with autism, an advanced audiology clinic, and the Therapeutic Intervention



Patti and Fred Shafer served a combined 73 years in education

Program for medically fragile students. Personally, Fred was presented with the Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education Hall of Honor Award for distinguished service.

Patti Shafer entered her childhood with braces and crutches from polio. Doctors said she wouldn't walk, but that never fazed her parents, and as a result, Patti flourished. "I'm the person I am because they encouraged me to be outgoing, to achieve, and to never let excuses get in my way," she says. After receiving a B.S. in elementary education from Texas A&I University, and two master's degrees, she walked into an Austin classroom and pushed possibilities for others. Jobs in elementary and middle school in Port Lavaca and Victoria followed, with one year at the Region III Education Service Center. Her own experience proved as an "I can" attitude for students, and after 16 years, she became principal of Roland Elementary before moving to Katy ISD. She served as assistant principal of McDonald Junior High, the principal at West Memorial Junior High, and opened WoodCreek Junior High as their principal in 2008. She was also named the Outstanding Assistant Principal for Region III by the Texas Association of Secondary Principals in 1996.

Devoted Namesakes

The Shafers' striving for excellence has continued since 2012 as school namesakes. "We made the commitment to be actively involved and Shafer Elementary has become our second family," Fred says. "We do what we can to support the teachers and staff and be actively involved in making

“We do what we can to support the teachers and staff and be actively involved in making Shafer Elementary an exciting place to learn.” - Fred Shafer

Shafer Elementary an exciting place to learn.” The retired teachers attend most events and act as mentors, chatting with students at lunch or recess. Traditions began, such as reading *Polar Express* at Christmas and the fall Book Character Parade, where the Shafers preside as king and queen. When the school year ends, the couple autographs thousands of yearbooks, T-shirts, lunch kits, and student ID badges.

In addition to their celebrity appearances, the staff makes it a point to inform the Shafers about students, whether it is recognition earned or a family tragedy, so the couple can write notes of congratulations or concern. The school also develops a character-driven life, and the Shafers reinforce the seven traits of a Shafer Silver Knight: courage, honor, integrity, justice, kindness, loyalty, and respect. “Our greatest joy is being involved in the lives of students,” Patti says. “It allows us to remain active in the district although retired after 73 combined years in the field of education.” **KM**

GAIL G. COLLINS has authored three books on life abroad, believing writing is the best excuse to talk to strangers.



SHAFER SALUTES

“They exemplify the best of being educators. They are dedicated to helping all students grow emotionally, intellectually, and socially. It is such an honor to serve as principal of a school that exemplifies the strong character and dedication of Fred and Patti Shafer!”

- Principal Melissa B. Salyer

“We can always depend on Fred and Patti to bring positive attitudes and great joy wherever they go. Their fingerprints are everywhere in the building.”

- Counselor Alicia J. Leung

At the end of the year, the Shafers are known to autograph thousands of yearbooks, T-shirts, lunch kits, and student ID badges

