For the love of teaching

Online program helps local woman make childhood dream come true

Cynthia Beaudette
of the Muscatine Journal

MUSCATINE, IOWA — It's taken some time, but Cathy Kramer is making her childhood dream come true. “I always wanted to be a teacher,” said Kramer. “Some of the teachers I had in school really made a difference in my life and changed my life.”

Kramer completed a new teacher intern program and a Masters of Education program, Kramer, 50, in living out her dreams in the classroom at Muscatine High School. Kramer graduated in 1985 with a Bachelor of Science degree in food science from Purdue University. She has been a food research scientist at the USDA for the past 15 years, worked in technical sales and sales management at Grain Processing Corp. in Muscatine. But she never lost her fascination with teaching.

In December 2005, Kramer, a mother of two daughters, Anna, 12, and Caroline, 11, realized she wanted to spend more time traveling for her career and having more time with her family. She also began exploring other areas of her life and wondering if she could still be a teacher.

Last year, Kramer decided to go back to school in more ways than one. In January 2006, she enrolled in the first online teacher education program at Kaplan University, which is based in Davenport. In July, she will be among the first six students to graduate from the online Masters of Education and Teacher Intern programs at Kaplan. Michele Stipe, director of public relations for Kaplan, said the six students are from throughout Iowa and Kramer is the only student from Muscatine. The programs are specifically designed to help professionals make smoother career transitions. “Kathy got to a point in her life where she realized that if she wanted to continue climbing the career ladder, it would require more time and travel away from her family,” said Carmen McKoon, a public relations associate at Kaplan. “So she got off the ladder and decided to pursue her childhood dream.”

Kramer is also helping Iowa Department of Education and the M-Acadia Community School District meet one of their challenges. State and local officials are striving to recruit middle and high school math and science teachers to overcome a shortage of candidates that is common nationwide.

Final approval

The online Master's of Education and Iowa Teacher Intern Certificate programs were introduced at Kaplan in 2006 with conditional approvals. Last week, Kaplan University officials announced that the Iowa State Board of Education granted full approval for Kaplan's programs.

Kramer said the Kaplan program is flexible. She completed a master's degree in meteorology at St. Ambrose University in Davenport in 2001. “I took evening classes, attending every class,” she said. “This, the Kaplan program, has been wonderful. I can do it in my bunny slippers and can do it when I want.”

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on my time. You have to be organized, but it’s been really good.”

The Kaplan program includes internship teaching positions, where candidates continue to earn money as they complete the certification program. Stipe said the intern program includes 44 quarter credit hours and a 12-month internship, and takes 12-18 months to complete. The cost for this program is about $13,000.

Many times, students decide to complete the Masters of Education program, which requires 56 quarter credit hours rather than 44. The cost for this program is approximately $17,000 and it takes 15-18 months to complete, Stipe said.

At the beginning of the 2006-07 school year, Kramer became an intern, teaching biology and physical science classes for freshmen and sophomores at Muscatine High School. “It’s a honor to teach,” said Kramer. “Biology is going to change these kids’ world the same way computers changed our world. It’s changing medi-