

## STUDENTS BID FAREWELL TO THEIR 'MAMMA KEITH'

**AFTER 31 YEARS IN THE JOLIET GRADE SCHOOL SYSTEM, THE EDNA KEITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IS RETIRING.**

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By CATHERINE ANN VELASCO

Before a school assembly, second-grader Jeremy Krizmanic didn't want Principal Donna Rudd to catch him with a six-pack of Diet Coke so he hunched over it. "(Rudd) thinks we are closing off the year with a rally for having good behavior," said Bobbie Bates, literacy coach at Edna Keith Elementary School.



**Edna Keith Principal Donna Rudd wipes her eye during a surprise retirement assembly to thank her for her years of hard work and support. Rudd has been in the Joliet Grade School District for 31 years.**

*(John Patsch/Staff Photographer)*

Instead, they held a surprise retirement party Monday for Rudd, who first attended the school as a third-grader and decades later is retiring as principal.

"We wanted to include the children so they could say goodbye," Bates said.

### 'They actually love her'

Teacher Karen Blaha said the fourth- and fifth-graders thought Rudd should have a care package, including her favorite goodies.

As Rudd sat in a chair shaped as a hand, Jeremy and other students gave her presents, such as Diet Coke, Cheetos, gourmet coffee, a memory quilt, homemade cards and a scrapbook of Keith Cougar Memories.

Rudd wiped away tears as she listened to "Let There Be Peace On Earth," during a PowerPoint presentation that included letters written by students, thanking her for teaching them how to be peace builders.

When Rudd returned to her alma mater as principal four years ago, she brought the motto, "Keith Cougars are always respectful, responsible and safe."

"She completely changed the whole climate of the school with her presence," Blaha said.

"They actually love her. They consider her Mamma Keith," Blaha said. "The students say, 'When we're out of line, she will discipline us. She rewards us nicely when we are really good.'"

Jeavondas Crayton, 10, agreed.

"You taught us the meaning of words, integrity and respect. You taught us there are better ways to solve problems than fighting," he said. "But most of all, you showed us that peace begins with one person and can spread to many people."

**'I was pretty surprised'**

Rudd began her teaching career with Joliet Grade School District in 1977 at her alma mater, Washington Junior High as a science teacher. In 1992, she became an academic advisor before becoming the assistant principal in 1999. In 2003, she was assistant principal at Gompers Junior High. In 2004, Rudd became principal at Edna Keith.

"I was pretty surprised. They pulled it off pretty good," Rudd said. "I'm very pleased with their gifts and how secretive they all can be."

For 30 years, Rudd stayed in the neighborhood of Washington Junior High and Edna Keith schools.

"It's been nice to see my former students over the years and see how much they have progressed, and their kids and their families, and see what they have done with their lives."