

# Nudelman's new 'career'

Created on Wednesday, 06 August 2014 01:00 | Written by [Kate Hoots](#) |

## Community volunteer Gene Nudelman finds a fit at Lowrie Primary School

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Gene Nudelman has thrived in at least three careers in his 76 years. He also has enjoyed three retirements, each of them rather briefer than anticipated. This time, though, he has found a job he intends to stay in.

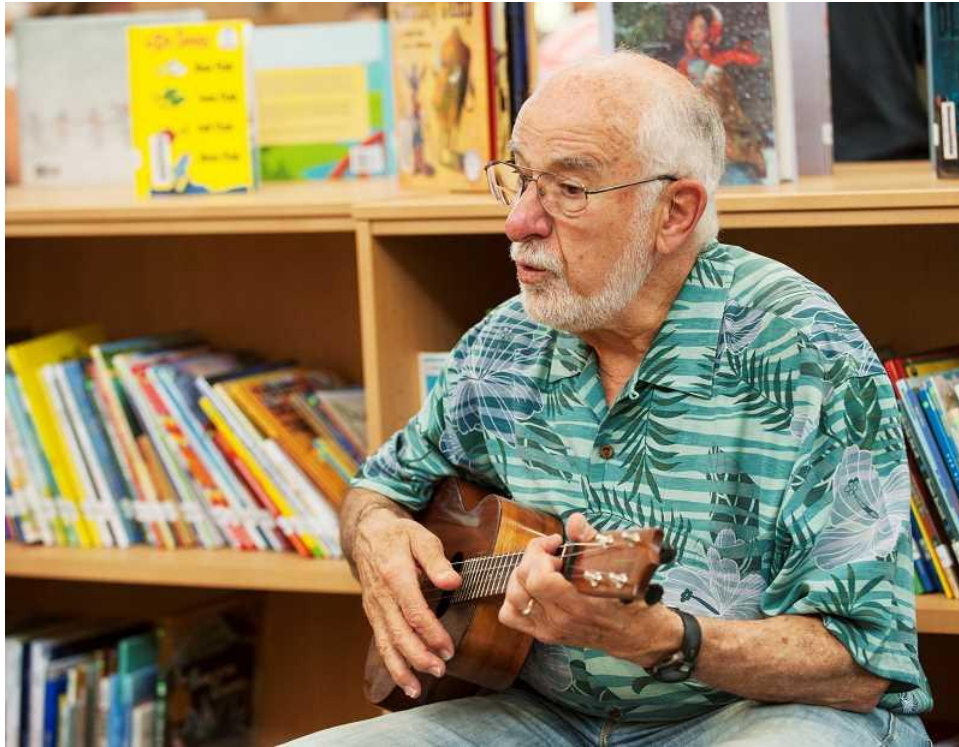


Photo Credit: SPOKEMAN PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Gene Nudelman, a volunteer at Lowrie Primary School, spent time sharing his musical gifts with children during the schools open library hours in July.

He is a regular volunteer at Lowrie Primary School. But it's not his first — or his only — volunteer position. When he celebrated his first retirement, from the family business of tuxedo rentals, in the late 1980s, he went in search of meaningful volunteer work and ended up connecting with Loaves and Fishes and Meals on Wheels.

"I joined the team as a delivery person," Nudelman said. "Being in service to people who are often in desperate need of a meal — it was nice going in to visit these people and just talking to them."

After five years delivering meals, he received a call from a fellow Kiwanis Club member. The Kiwanis camp on Mount Hood was in looking for a director, he was told. The camp offers children with disabilities a chance to enjoy the outdoors in a supportive environment.

"I said, 'I don't really know anything about people with disabilities,'" Nudelman recalled. "He said, 'We're looking for someone who can run a business.' I was there for 13 years."

In those years, Nudelman learned quite a lot about working with people who need a little extra effort.

"I saw how wonderful it was for people to be in an environment where they could be who they are, without people staring at them. They could be challenged and be successful," he said.



Photo Credit: SPOKEMAN PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - The children at Lowrie call Nudelman Papa Gene and enjoy seeing him at the school.

Eventually, Nudelman decided it was time to retire — again. After leaving his position at the Kiwanis camp, he and his wife moved to Florida and spent a couple of years there. Nudelman found a new way to volunteer, working with an outdoor environmental program for children.

“Being of help felt good,” he said.

After a couple of years, the couple returned to Oregon, and Nudelman’s wife settled into a position in the realty business, running the Keller Williams Realty office in Tualatin. That gave Nudelman a chance to embark upon his third career: His wife asked him to fill in for someone in the office — “for a couple weeks,” Nudelman said. Five years later, she gently let him know that it was time for him to move on.

And suddenly, Nudelman found himself retiring for the third time and looking for a new way to contribute to his community. He had a particular interest in working with children.

“My family is spread around the country,” Nudelman said, with grandchildren and great-grandchildren in Orlando, Boston and Colorado.

“I had time on my hands. I went to the adult community center and asked about different things I could get involved with,” he said. He has stayed involved in Kiwanis, and he has joined a ukulele group. But it wasn’t enough.

“I said, ‘There’s a piece missing,’ and that is being with young people and being useful,” he said.

A resident of Wilsonville’s Villebois neighborhood, Nudelman didn’t have to look far to find the opportunity he craved. He approached Patrick Meigs, the principal of his neighborhood school, Lowrie Primary.

“He said, ‘What do you want to do?’ I said, ‘What do you need?’” Nudelman said.

He ended up helping in the library, where he had the perfect view to appreciate the beauty that is Lowrie.

“The center of everything is this library area,” he said. “(Librarian) Kimberley Rhoades sits with the children on these risers and teaches them. The teacher, everybody seems so involved, so professional. There’s a lot of heart here, a lot of warmth.”



Photo Credit: SPOKEMAN PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Nudelman says he is happy to do anything he is asked to do to help out at Lowrie Primary School, but working with children is clearly one of his favorite activities.

Known to the children at Lowrie as “Papa Gene,” Nudelman volunteers on Mondays at the library in Lowrie and during events like the school’s book fair.

“If I have some other free time, I’ll pop in,” he said. “If they call me for anything, I’ll come in. It doesn’t matter what it is. My first job was cleaning the restrooms at my father’s store. I’m not afraid to get my hands dirty.”

“He is happy to do whatever is needed, but I believe he is most happy interacting with kids,” Kimberley Rhoades said. “He is patient, generous, and funny. He ... is a familiar face and kids know they can ask him questions and that he will happily help them find books. I also think kids enjoy seeing someone other than a teacher or a parent around, particularly one who is elderly and doesn’t have kids at our school.”

Nudelman especially delights in sharing his love of music with his young friends at Lowrie.

“Today was really special,” he said during a summertime “open library” event July 30. “It was mostly little kids here, kindergartners and first-graders. They related to me because I knew songs that they were familiar with. That makes it easier.”

“He does look at it as a job in a sense, and likely because we — me, in particular — have learned he is wonderful to have around,” Rhoades said. “He knows his time here is valued, by both children and adults.

“It is a big statement he makes just by being here,” she added. “I treasure his presence here as much for what he gives to our school, as well as for what his time here says about being part of a community: It is important, and worthwhile and meaningful. That is a lesson he teaches every day just by being present.”

So, is there a fourth retirement in Nudelman’s future?





Photo Credit: SPOKEMAN PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Nudelman plays a variety of stringed instruments, including the ukelele.

“I don’t plan on this one ending,” he said firmly. “We are residents of this community. My volunteer activities revolve around this community. My plan is, my wife will retire about a year from now. We will stay in this community.”

Rhoades knows that Lowrie is lucky to have Nudelman as a volunteer.

“He is truly a one of a kind,” she said.

Nudelman also feels lucky to have the opportunity to volunteer.

“It’s like opening up a new world, with my feet on the ground. I’m truly blessed,” he said. “I have my health. I have my wits about me. I like to laugh. I like to kid around. I like to be involved. I’m always learning something new.”

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