

# ALUMNI PARTNERS IN INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

## Two LVC Grads Mentor the Next Generation of Teachers

by Kenya McCullum

The professional paths of **Janet Gessner Roberts '68** and **Toni Salam Butz '90** seemed destined to cross. Not only are they teachers and instructional coaches at the North Penn School District in Montgomery County, Pa., but they both are also LVC alumnae.

Roberts, who graduated from LVC in 1968 with a bachelor of science degree in elementary education, has been teaching in the district for 21 years. Butz graduated from LVC in 1990 with a bachelor of arts degree in literature and began teaching at North Penn the same year. While both are involved in an innovative professional development program at the district and work closely together, neither of them realized that the other attended LVC until a chance conversation.

"Toni and I realized that we were both LVC grads quite by accident," says Roberts. "One day as we walked out to the parking lot together, Toni said, 'Oh, there's an LVC license plate. I wonder whose that could be?' I looked at her and said, 'That's my car. I graduated from LVC.' 'So did I!' she replied."

### LVC's Long-lasting Influence

Although coincidental, it isn't surprising that both Roberts and Butz are LVC graduates who are excelling in their careers. Both teachers recall their years at the College fondly and credit LVC with the preparation that they needed to succeed.

"LVC's education program not only prepared me for my role as a teacher, but also provided me with the background and depth of knowledge a liberal arts education can provide," says Roberts.

Butz also recalls the benefits of LVC's strong liberal arts curriculum, but it is the dedication of the faculty that especially made a lasting impression on her.

"What really made Lebanon Valley College work for me was the unshakable sense of community," said Butz. "LVC's small size truly fostered the rich and close relationships students were able to have with faculty members.

"I vividly remember going to **Dr. John Kearney's** [professor of English] home in Annville for dinner. There, we discussed not only the merits of British and English literature, but our personal lives as well. I also



*Toni Salam Butz '90 and Janet Gessner Roberts '68 serve as instructional coaches in an innovative professional development program for teachers.*

remember **Dr. Mark Townsend** [chair and professor of mathematical sciences] sitting most nights at the student snack bar just so he could help students. I remember having to get his help on more than one occasion."

It is this sense of community and dedication that have had a strong impact on Roberts' and Butz's careers—and it has influenced their participation in North Penn School District's Partners in Learning program.

### Partners in Mentoring

The Partners in Learning program at the North Penn School District is a professional development program for teachers that provides a non-evaluative and confidential environment for growth.

"We meet with all new teachers at least three times in their first year, giving a wide range of support options, including providing resources, classroom visits for observations or data collection, lesson planning, classroom management tips, teaching demonstration lessons or co-teaching lessons planned together, and reviewing student work to inform instruction," said Roberts.

North Penn is not the only school district that recognizes the benefits of mentoring teachers. "Across the country, school districts from Boston to Los Angeles are integrating a variety of models of coaching programs," says Roberts. Ours takes a global look at instruction with the ultimate goal of improving student

achievement in reading, writing, and math."

There's a good reason why these types of programs are becoming more and more commonplace in school districts—teachers and students alike have reaped the benefits that professional development programs like Partners in Learning provide.

"As teacher instructional practices grow and are implemented, student learning and achievement are positively impacted," said Roberts, who coaches elementary teachers. "Teachers feel more supported and less alone in their instruction."

This program provides the kind of support that Roberts and Butz received while attending Lebanon Valley College. Butz, who coaches secondary writing, says that given the quality of education that LVC provides, it's not surprising that two teachers who are instructional coaches in the Partners in Learning program are also LVC alumnae.

Furthering their connection, LVC is also where both educators met their future husbands—both named Steve and both involved in education. Butz married **Stephen Butz '90**, now an assistant principal at Bucks County Vocational Technical School in Fairless Hills and a doctoral candidate. Roberts married **Stephen Roberts '65**, an LVC trustee and entrepreneur.

**Kenya McCullum is a freelance writer based in San Francisco.**