

TREDYFFRIN EDUCATOR RETURNS TO TEACHING AFTER ILLNESS

By Sarah E. Moran • Monday, May 16, 2011



Staff photo by Amy Drago Fran Lubbs stands in front of her Goddard School in Strafford.

TREDYFFRIN — Fran Lubbs is living her dream. Her dream has to do with children — 100 of them, to be exact.

She owns a Goddard School franchise in Strafford, a business she has operated since bouts of ovarian and then breast cancer caused her to stand back from herself.

The Goddard School® provides childcare and early education services to more than 43,000 children at 370 schools in 34 states, among them 40 in Pennsylvania and eight in Chester County.

An executive for the King of Prussia-based Goddard Systems Inc. when she fell ill for a second time in 2000, Lubbs “took a look at my life and re-evaluated it,” she said during a recent interview. “I wanted to

stop traveling and I wanted to sleep in my own bed each night. I wanted to have more time for my family. And I wanted to get back to hands-on early childhood education instead of being on the corporate side. Early childhood teaching has always been my first love.”

Then the Strafford Goddard School came up for sale. A short drive from the Tredyffrin home she shares with husband, Bryant, construction director for the David Group, the school was a natural fit.

Lubbs purchased the company-owned location and now also owns the 6,500-square-foot building.

She and her staff of 34 full- and part-time teachers take care of about 100 children a day, ranging in age from six weeks to kindergartners. Cost ranges from \$1,375 a month per child for full-time infant care to \$1,150 for full-time preschool and kindergarten.

Lubbs is intimately involved in the business dealings of her school and has a full-time educational director to handle that side of things.

She spends as much time as she can with the children, “reading them my favorite stories and singing them my favorite songs.”

This is no hands-off venture, mind you. The Goddard School requires its franchisees to be hands-on owners, on school premises every day. She considered buying a second location but in order to do that, according to how Goddard runs its railroad, she would need to find a business partner.

Husband Bryant helps with financial questions and is also her chief maintenance man. The Lubbs have two grown children. Their son lives in Minnesota and their daughter will be married in two weeks.

In the decades she's been involved in education, Lubbs doesn't see much difference in the children she knows and loves. "They still have that same innocence and joy for life," she mused.

"But it's their parents who have changed.

They're more frazzled. And way more structured. The stress of raising a family with two parents who work full-time really gets to people. I also see lots of stress among our stay-at-home moms."

She believes that life was a lot simpler when she was growing up in suburban Chicago. "We were more isolated," she said. "We didn't have TV and we certainly didn't have computers, the Internet or cell phones. We had time to play hopscotch and jump rope outside."

Her school, she hopes, allows students time to play. Some time is unstructured for that very purpose.

One positive trend in the 10 years that Lubbs has owned her Goddard School: Few 6-week-olds are among those being cared for at the school.

"It used to be that many of our babies were just six weeks old when they first came to us," she said. "Now, they're much more likely to be 12 to 16 weeks old" — a change she attributes to the Family Medical Leave Act, which mandates longer paid maternity and paternity leave for companies with more than 50 employees.

Now cancer-free, Lubbs said she continues to live with the disease and always will.

"I want to make a difference, one child at a time, and that's what I hope I'm doing," she said.