

THE PRINCIPAL TEACHER

An Interview With New Julian High Principal James Peabody

“Most people,” says new Julian Unified High School principal James Peabody, “don’t realize that the word ‘principal’ was originally an adjective. The position used to be called ‘principal teacher’, but somewhere along the line the ‘teacher’ part got dropped. I’d like to put it back.”

Indeed, Peabody has spent twenty-four of his twenty-seven years in education as a biology teacher, and he misses the classroom. As an administrator, he says, “I try to see everything through the lens of a teacher.”

Still in the process of evaluating the school’s academic situation, Peabody regularly goes into the classroom to observe teachers and students in action. “I can’t support,” he says, “what I don’t know.” In fact, the new principal is an ubiquitous presence on campus, his tall frame seen pacing the sidelines of athletic events, waiting tables at a student dinner, or standing in the parking lot as school opens to make sure he has a chance to greet the students.

“It’s important,” he says, “for the students to know that they’re welcome.”

Apparently he also thinks that it’s important for this “great group of students” to see their principal throughout the school day. He tries to schedule meetings after school closes so that he doesn’t spend the day closed up in his office. Aware that his position has been something of a revolving door, Peabody declines to comment on the past but simply says, “I’m here and I’m not looking for anything else.”

Armed with a ready smile and a battery of jokes mostly older than Julian itself, Peabody admits, “I’m not exactly the retiring type.”

A former cross-country runner and coach who claims that he’s won every fight he’s ever been in by at least ten paces, Peabody isn’t about to even walk away from any battle to improve

the education of Julian kids. He believes that his experience as an administrator in the large Grossmont district and in the San Diego County Office Of Education gives him the background and connections to cut through bureaucratic red tape to acquire the resources, facilities and “decent environment” that the students need.

Still, he always comes back to his true love - teaching.

“When I have a decision to make,” says Peabody, “it’s a simple question I ask myself: Will this enhance the experience in the classroom?”

Peabody will host a coffee for Julian residents at the Julian Coffee Shop the second Wednesday of every month at 9:00 am. The first coffee will be this Wednesday, March 12th. For more information contact Jami Waldon of Julian Parent Collation at 765-4666.