

Pickering College's Sturup set for retirement after more than 27 years as Head of School

When Peter Sturup began his career in education more than 30 years ago, he didn't set out with a specific driving philosophy.

"Trials by fire" in the world of education instead helped him zero in on just what made teachers and instructors stand out from the crowd.

This real-world experience served him well throughout his career, including the last 27 years as Head of School at Newmarket's Pickering College.

Now that he's about to retire as the longest-serving head of a Canadian independent school, he's looking back with satisfaction both on what he has contributed to the school and to the staff and students who will continue his legacy.

"When I first started, I wanted to be in the classroom, working with students and conveying information about geography, which was my subject area," he recalls. "I was very passionate about the environment, alternative energy, and that was really driving me, but it really took some time for me to zero in on what the role of an independent school could be.

"Once I became Head of School, I realized that I needed to articulate my vision to other people, so I really had to learn to read, listen, make mistakes, and take time to formulate what my role and [vision for] what education could be. I have learned as much as I have taught over those years and I am still learning."

Sturup says his mission at Pickering College has been to recognize each student has "the ability and the responsibility to make the world greater, better and more beautiful."

"If that's what we're expecting of our students, I think we as adults need to set the example and the school needs to set the example, and I think it has been very important corporately to do that," he says. "From a pedagogical, philosophical basis, I think we have young people who have a lot going for them and I want them to understand that they have the responsibility to use what they learn, use whatever resources they have at their disposal, to recognize when something is not right.

"They have a role in changing things - the injustice they see, the intolerance they see, [the ability to] say this is not what I agree with, but also have the skills to know what to do and not feel helpless. That has been my motivating factor for many years now."

This vision has manifested itself in many ways, including Pickering College's Global Leadership Program, where students are required to identify a real-world problem and then develop and implement real-world solutions to address it.

Looking back at his teaching career, Sturup says the most fulfilling moments for educators are those where it is clear you have made a difference to someone.

"I am a big believer in the power that we have to change things comes from the individual interactions we have with people; that simply knowing someone, caring about them, asking how they are, learning more about them - those are the things that can really recognize a person, can make them feel cared about, encouraged and believed in. I think the most fulfilling things for me have been those times where I have seen a light go on, someone asking a question when I was least suspecting it, or understood that someone is in a better place or has accomplished something because I have been able to help them in some way."

He can also take pride in the state he leaves Pickering College.

There is record enrolment, the school is about to embark on a significant build on a 48,000 square foot building for which they hope to break ground on in the next few weeks, and with a full complement of teachers and staff he says he has full confidence in.

?My biggest goal is to leave the school in the hands of an incredibly professional, competent, experienced educator who is coming in to lead the school and I have incredible confidence leaving it in her hands,? says Sturup of his successor, Dr. Cinde Lock, who is coming to Pickering College from Branksome Hall Asia. ?I want her to take the school to the next step, which I know she is going to do.

?Pickering College is a great school and will continue to do the outstanding work that it does. It is a very special place, it is a very unique place. I think our Quaker foundations have given us a real sense of focus and direction in heart and soul that guide how we teach, how we work with one another, how we care for one another.

?Newmarket and Aurora are amazing communities and I am so proud to have been a part of this area and seeing their growth and the future. I am proud that Pickering is a part of that and I look forward to seeing it continue as a very vibrant part of what Newmarket and Aurora are doing in the future.?

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