

# Education

## GYAC Academic Success Coordinator retires

**Christina Tascon**  
YourNews contributor

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY -- The halls of the Gifford Youth Achievement Center will be a little quieter without Academic Success Coordinator Alfonso Chester's greetings and words of encouragement to students.

After 13 years at the GYAC and more than 35 working with children, Chester is retiring at age 70.

"I am going to work on my Corvette," said Chester, who once owned an auto shop. "I am going to garden, write a book about my experiences in Vietnam and a book of poetry, travel to Washington DC and spoil my little six-month-old niece."

Normally the story of a teacher's retirement does not garner much attention. Not so with Chester who has been at the heart of the center's teachers, staff and students.

The GYAC campus is unique in that everyone first comes to the gymnasium where students first check in before getting to their homework. Every student was greeted by Chester each day with a word of welcome, sometimes with a hug or questions on how their day went at school or home the night before.

"Did you talk to your teacher about your missing book?" "How's your brother doing?" "Are you feeling better today?"

Simple questions which let each child know that someone cared about what was going on in their life. To many he was a comforting presence, but it was also his job to be the taskmaster who teachers depended on to control the unruliest child.

He was known as the "kid whisperer" because even when a child was having a meltdown, Chester could calm and reach them when no one else could. And he kept the peace by using the drill sergeant skills he learned in the Army.

"You see a child who is yelling, throwing things and he or she is not a bad kid," said Chester. "You have to learn his story and find out what is really the problem."



On his last day before retirement the school held a pizza party for Alfonso Chester so the students, staff and board members could show appreciation for his service. PHOTOS BY CHRISTINA TASCAN



Alfonso Chester tried to have a welcoming word for each student as they arrived after school.

Chester served as a mentor and role model for many and past students constantly stopped in to say hello and keep him in the loop about their lives.

"There are certain children who will just come and find me in this building



Chester and GYAC board chairman Adam Bolinger.

whether I am in the gym or around the classrooms," he said. "I am really going to miss all the children."



Chester took the time to chat with the students each day.

It is impossible to measure all Chester did to enhance the lives of GYAC students. He developed computer programs to help the students and parents. He also worked the school district to keep the center in the loop regarding student's grades and attendance.

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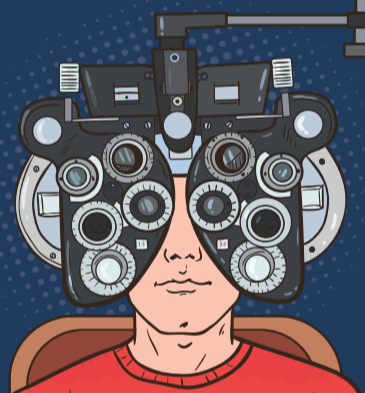
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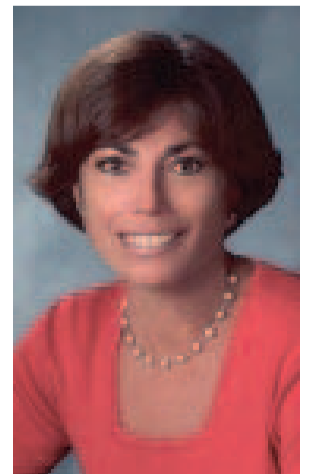
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