

# 'Wizard of Oz' finale grand for Bonduel Elementary teacher

## Bonduel 1st-grade shows ending

By Scott Williams

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Denise Rudersdorf has reached the end of her yellow brick road.

The Bonduel school teacher is retiring after producing "The Wizard of Oz" every year for more than two decades with first-grade students playing Dorothy and the other beloved characters.

The show has become a popular community tradition that draws big audiences. It also creates lasting memories for the first-graders who get a chance to step into the spotlight.

So much so that members of Rudersdorf's first cast from 1995 returned last week and surprised her with an impromptu reunion during her



LEADER PHOTO BY SCOTT WILLIAMS

Denise Rudersdorf, shown in her classroom at Bonduel Elementary School, is retiring after more than 20 years of producing "The Wizard of Oz" shows with the school's first-graders.

final show before retirement.

Mindy Lohff, who played Dorothy as a first-grader in 1995, is now a 28-year-old career woman with a son who will be starting school in another year or two. Lohff remembers

the excitement of performing in the "Wizard of Oz" in first grade, and she is impressed that Rudersdorf made the show a yearly tradition with other children.

"I feel very thankful to have

had her as a teacher," Lohff said. "I think our community is very lucky to have had her."

The surprise reunion also included Beth Przybylski, who played the first wicked witch, and Tim Kroll, the first cowardly lion.

Retiring after 27 years as a teacher, Rudersdorf said producing "The Wizard of Oz" was challenging at times, but she always enjoyed working with the children.

After months preparation every year, the teacher always beamed with pride while watching the 6- and 7-year-olds find their voices and become stage performers.

"They love it," she said. "It's always worth it in the end."

The teacher's final cast last week included first-grader Peyton Westrich, who had seen her two older brothers perform in "The Wizard of Oz" in previ-