Learning Resource Spotlight: Donna Meallet

One of the joys of sitting in the 3-4-5/Middle School pickup line is not only the prospect of reuniting with your children, but also getting an occasional glimpse of a Middle School gym class in action on Daniels Field. Often it's a soccer pick-up game for a few minutes before returning to lockers and homerooms and carpool and after-school sports. All Stanley students enjoy a variety of physical activities – tests of skill and strategy and creativity, the hallmark of Stanley’s PE programs at all grade levels. In the Middle School, we’re talking everything from golf, to human foosball and fencing. You know it's fall when archery targets hit the field. It's spring when kids play ultimate frisbee, tennis, flag football. And you know it's just after winter break when you hear about the 12 different types of dodge ball Donna lines up to wake kids back up to the demands of a ‘typical’ Stanley PE class.

Experiencing one of these with Donna means a number of positive things: All in the first five minutes, kids show up, change and start four laps of the ½-gym at a swift jog, only to finish up stretching as a group and awaiting Donna’s plans for the day. Have you ever seen your own kid get ready for something this quickly? They do for Donna. Today, during the introduction of the basketball unit for 6th graders, Donna set up a twist on the original game: Peach baskets replaced by milk crates, no-bounce and passing-only like the old days, but crates held in the hands of one player who can move the target within reach of teammates to improve scoring. After a few clarifying questions, this section of middle schoolers had a great time. They connected passes, made runs to open up the court, included all their teammates … just what you’d hope for.

Donna’s classes cover the traditional games and skills kids are warming up to in K-5th grades where they exercise large- and fine-motor skills, learn about fairness and team-play. The 6-7-8 kids add to that the history of sports and get more into skills and drills. And she always leaves room for surprises. To come up with these original games, says Donna, “I think of one kid. Usually the one with the most questions for me. Then I envision the made-up game through that student’s eyes. It always improves the first go-round; then I fine-tune it as each section tries it out.” These informal games break up Donna’s year-long curriculum, which starts and ends with the Presidential Fitness Challenge (this year featuring a strength-training unit – linked below – Donna developed with the advice of a pediatrician, students, of course, and her own research and experience.) http://www.stanleybps.org/pages/Stanley_British_Primary_School/Classes/279170653691595046/Class_Info/BPS_fitness_training_D-Meallet

Donna – a native of Denver, CSU grad, mother of two, and twice-certified fitness trainer – began her teaching career at Stanley in 1999, when her oldest child, Alexandra (now a senior at UC Santa Barbara), came here as a kindergartner. “I knew it was the place for me, too,” Donna says about that first year. “I fell in love with the community and knew that I wanted to be a part of it.” The one thing that represents Stanley to her? “Family Groups,” she says. “It's our entire community coming together, to learn together, to grow together, being one together.”

Rounding out Donna’s nearest and dearest are her son Josiah (also a Stanley grad and now a senior at East High School), and her mother Grandma D who works with Donna during Summer at Stanley Extreme Fun and Milk & Cookies. Donna, an athlete herself, bikes, swims – developed a kids’ triathlon that ran for several years – and likes to relax by reading or watching “Scandal.” She’s also quite fond of rafting class 3 or higher rapids.

Donna sees her role here as having a positive impact on students by motivating and empowering them to be active, healthy individuals. Her students see that she treats them with respect, and she plays fair. “B.J. Neblett wrote that ‘We are the sum total of our experiences,’” quotes Donna. “My experiences as mother, coach,
instructor, athlete, sales rep, business owner, student, and community volunteer have allowed me to be a respectful, enthusiastic, dedicated teacher."

Another of Donna’s favorite quotes, “Always do more than you promise but never promise more than you can do,” comes from American football coach Lou Holtz. “It's how I want people to think of me,” says Donna. “I am passionate and excited about a variety of things: Mother – shaping my children’s lives to be smart, healthy, individual thinkers who are not afraid to take risks. Teacher – being a positive role model. And Extreme Community Makeover volunteer – cleaning up our community one block at a time.” It is a nice world when we imagine doing as much as Donna has for the middle school physical education program – and the kids who enjoy it – here at Stanley.