

Educating others was principal's true passion

Susan McCance of Anaheim Union had "inspired people and believed in them. And they came to believe in themselves."

By **ROBIN HINCH**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

A LIFE STORY

Despite the fact that she was downright diminutive, no one thought of Susan McCance as small.

As a teacher, activities director and, later, a junior high school principal, she was forceful, energetic, vibrant, outspoken and feisty; her presence was far larger than her physical stature.

She was a hands-on educator - the kind who knew the name of every child in her school and had individual chats with each of them. The kind who, when she heard of a gang fight on campus, marched right out there and got smack in the middle of it.

Never fearsome or harsh, she had the affection and respect of both kids and teachers. They seemed to sense that her twin passions were helping kids learn and helping teachers bring the lessons home.

Susan was 51 when she died unexpectedly Aug. 22 of a stroke. She recently had been promoted to director of curriculum and instruction for the Anaheim Union High School District.

She was born in Glendale and spent her early years in Alhambra. Her family moved to Anaheim in time for her to attend Ball Junior High, where she would later become assistant principal, and graduate from Loara High School.

At California State University, Fullerton she studied English and Spanish. Upon graduation, she became a technical writer for Allergan Pharmaceuticals.

She hated the job and finally decided to become a teacher.

Her first teaching job was at a junior high in Corona where she had to teach Spanish, of which she knew little, and coach soccer, although she'd never been to a game.

It was an early test of her pluck and determination and



Susan McCance

Born: Feb. 6, 1953, Glendale

Died: Aug. 22, 2004, Santa Ana

Survivors: Husband, Mike Smith; mother, Josephine; brother, Chuck

Services: Have been held. Arrangements by Saddleback Chapel, Tustin

Donations: CADA (California Association of Directors of Activities) Scholarship Fund, c/o Cindy Bader, 90 Village Circle, San Rafael, CA 94903

she passed with flying colors.

Susan began her 22-year career with the Anaheim Union High School District in 1982, teaching English as a second language at South Junior High. Two years later, she became a counselor at Orangeview Junior High. One of her counselees was Tiger Woods.

She served as assistant principal at several schools before becoming principal at Brookhurst Junior High in 1997, where she helped implement a character-education program that greatly improved campus climate.

She was also active for many years in CADA (California Association of Directors of Activities) because she so strongly believed in the importance of extracurricular activities to students.

She was devoted to her job, arriving on campus at 7 a.m. and returning home 12 hours later.

She was in and out of every

classroom, encouraging students and advising staff. Her energy, exuberance and curiosity were infectious. And her staff liked her honest, straightforward manner.

Susan never let down or let others down. Nothing ruffled her and she never expressed anger - only praise and encouragement.

"She inspired people and believed in them. And they came to believe in themselves," said former district Superintendent Jan Billings.

Susan's first marriage ended in divorce and for years she lived alone but had an active social life with her many friends. She bought an elegant old house in Tustin a few years ago and dedicated herself to fixing it up.

An outstanding cook, she thought nothing of whipping up St. Patrick's Day corned beef and cabbage for 100 or one of her mother's native-Italian recipes (seasoned with her home-grown herbs) for other occasions. She loved to entertain and loved to be the center of any group.

You could tell where she was in a crowd by the sound of her husky voice (she was often called "Sir" over the phone) and her wonderful, distinctive laugh, which came often and easily.

A whiz at Scrabble and Trivial Pursuit, Susan was also partial to games - and highly competitive.

A tiny woman who was partial to stylish clothes (but only if she could find them on the half-price rack), she was best known for her crown of cascading brown curls.

She met Mike Smith, a motivational speaker, 17 years ago at an activities-director training camp and they reconnected and married in 2002. Susan could hardly believe she had found such happiness.

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