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Being principal a family affair

Twin sisters, father serve in position

By [George Basler](#)
Press & Sun-Bulletin

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If you call Richard Stank's house on Thanksgiving Day and ask for the principal, don't be surprised if three people answer the telephone.

One would be Stank, who had a 36-year career as a principal and superintendent in the Susquehanna Valley Central School District.

That's three principals in one family. And not only do Ivan and McKeveny have twin careers, they're fraternal twins, born five minutes apart Aug. 5, 1959.

Their younger sister, Tricia Goodenough, 42, is also in education, teaching second grade in the Dryden Central School District.

Like father, like son -- OK, they're daughters, but you get the idea.

Ivan and McKeveny have been drawn to education from their youngest days. Their favorite game as children was playing school, with themselves as teachers. "We made up our own classes of (imaginary) kids," McKeveny remembers. Their parents helped them along by giving them a big chalk board for their "classroom."

The twins give similar answers about what attracts them to education. One of the main rewards is the feeling of helping a students achieve goals they didn't think possible, Ivan said. McKeveny put it this way: "It's one of the professions where you can feel that sometimes you make a difference for kids, and through them the future."

Both believe their father played a role in their career choice, not by urging them directly, but by modeling how much he liked his job. "I saw how hard he worked, but I also saw how rewarding it was. He liked working with people in the community, parents and staff," Ivan said.

Ivan became principal at Chenango Bridge Elementary in 2001 after working as a health teacher and coach at Chenango Forks and Johnson City high schools. She was also assistant principal at Johnson City High School for four years.

McKeveny is in her first year as a principal. She began at Owego Elementary School in July after working as a Reading Recovery teacher in the Johnson City Central School District, and before that as a reading skills teacher at Broome Community College.



Photos by [GEORGE BASLER](#) / *Press & Sun-Bulletin*

Tamara Ivan is the Chenango Bridge Elementary School principal. She is the daughter of former Susquehanna Valley Central School District principal and superintendent Richard Stank and twin sister of Owego Elementary School Principal Laurie McKeveny, below.



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There's no sibling rivalry here. The twins talk at least once a week on issues ranging from discipline policies to playground organization to curriculum. They're always on call to give each other advice.

"It's great to have someone you can bounce things off who you trust and respect," Ivan said.

Nothing totally prepares a person for the demands of being a principal, McKeveny said. But her sister's advice helped, she said. Both she and Ivan welcome their roles as leaders in their buildings. They describe their administrative style as one of collaboration that focuses on involving all stakeholders in the building in the decision-making process.

Being a principal today is tougher than it's ever been, both said. Society has changed, with more students coming from split families, McKeveny said. And that can impact the support structure for a student, she believes. At the same time, some parents are more willing to challenge authority if they feel their child is not being fairly treated, Ivan said.

On top of this, principals and teachers face the demand of preparing students for state tests that are used to rate a school under the provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. "There's pressure on everyone from principal down to students," McKeveny said.

Asked to name the best part of their job, McKeveny and Ivan are quick to answer. The best part of a principal's day is interacting with the children in the hallways, in the cafeteria, wherever, they said.

Asked to name the worst part of their job, McKeveny listed disciplining students. She also finds it tough to deal with situations that she can't control. "You can't control the lives of children when they go home to difficult situations," she said.

For her part, Ivan most dislikes organizing for state tests and having to discipline adults in the building, be they teachers or staff. "I don't like confrontation, but I deal with it," she said.





Stank is proud of the three daughters and is on hand to give advice. But when the family gets together, education issues really don't come up. "We have 10 grandchildren, and most of them are involved in sports. So that's what we tend to talk about," he said.

STORYCHAT

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