

A COACH FOR THE classroom

Training and coaching teachers and counselors has been a 20-year passion for Woodburn's Ruth Herman Wells

BY MICHELLE TE

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While universities prepare future teachers to work with "Beaver Cleaver," more often than not, teachers in the classroom find chairs filled with students acting more like "Beavis and

Butthead."

For nearly 20 years, Woodburn's Ruth Herman Wells has been coaching and training school teachers and counselors on how to motivate those disaffected, disengaged students to learn despite the many issues surrounding their lives.

She often feels like a lost buoy in the ocean as she conducts national workshops on the topic of troubled kids.

"People have just grabbed me by the hands and said 'thank you,'" she said. "People who have wanted to retire early, but have found that this will help them."

Wells operates through an organization she founded called Youth Change, which offers resources and workshops to turn around troubled youth. She has just completed her newest book series, "Behavior Change Handouts," which complement her earlier offerings, "Quickest Kid Fixer-Uppers" and "Breakthrough Strategies to Teach and Counsel Youth" series.

"I try to make people 'instant mental health experts,'" said Wells. "While I know they are not really experts, at least I teach them some of the basics. Today's kid is more violent, more emotionally disturbed and has more extreme prob-



tion at home, the world doesn't care," she said. "The world says that you still have to read, write and make change."

She tells teachers that they must not abandon their mission of teaching, but try to find a balance in understanding what a child might be going through.

"You can't force a child to learn," she said.

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— RUTH HERMAN WELLS

lems."

She recently returned from a trip to New Orleans where she offered workshops to teachers and counselors who are trying to educate students whose lives have been completely altered by last year's Hurricane Katrina.

"Kids are distracted there," said Wells. "They don't care about school, they are traumatized."

While there, Wells saw electrical wires falling down in the streets, debris strewn everywhere, and even street signs gone.

"I couldn't figure out where I was going to find the school I was supposed to be at," she said. "It's tough for people to live like that. Kids are apathetic, traumatized and distracted."

Her mission was to show educators that there is "absolutely" a way to teach a child who is going through something like that.

"The reality is, if a kid goes through Katrina, or lives in poverty, or is not getting much atten-

"You have to hit the balance, and some teachers don't understand that."

Yet, children are living in perilous times and circumstances, she added.

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In the classroom, teachers are also often dealing with students who are more violent and demanding.

"Teachers are saying, 'This kid has pushed me or touched me inappropriately. I'm scared in my own classroom,'" said Wells. "Teachers just don't know how to control the kids because they are doing such scary stuff. Kids are going through their own 'personal Katrinas,' and teachers aren't trained for any of this."

Michelle Te/Independent

Ruth Herman Wells continues to help school teachers, counselors and administrators in dealing with disaffected students through her Youth Change organization. Through it, she holds seminars throughout the country to help schools better help and understand the kids that are coming through their system, and the issues many are facing.