

Stephen A. VanHoogstraat

He moved from south St. Louis to Fenton and the NW school district in 1965. He attended Murphy, North Jeff, and NHS, then graduated in 1973 in the top 10% of class. He was in Student Council 4 years, Football 4 years, Basketball and baseball mgr. 1 year each. Member of FTA and FBLA (voted Mr. FBLA in conference meet). Drama club for one year, Senior Class President. Runner up for Mr. Northwest; lost to his locker partner John Prasuhn. He loved high school and often considered it to be some of the favorite years of his life. He joined the Navy right after high school and did two deployments on board the USS Lang (DE 1060) that was home ported in San Diego. Besides being the primary protection for the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea during the last years of the Viet Nam war, they provided NGFS (naval gun fire support) to soldiers and marines in Viet Nam and participated in the evacuation of Saigon and the rescue and retrieval of SS Mayaguez (supply ship which provided ally support to our bases in Southeast Asia and was captured by the Cambodian forces). This was the last *official* battle of the war in southeast Asia. He spent the next 4 years as an anti-submarine warfare sonar specialist on board Lang during the cold war with Russia. He was honorably discharged in 1979 and spent the next 17 working for the Veterans Administration at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery. Taking care of the final resting places of thousands of military personal (many of whom he served with.)

He started subbing part time at NHS in 1991, then long term and then finally full time in 1995. He went to night school while subbing fulltime and received his teaching degree with Suma Cum Laude honors with a special emphasis in math. From 1995 – 2000 he ran the GRAD center (Getting Real About Diplomas; an educational support system for regular ed students (initially ran by a team of certified teachers supported with Title II funding)) He loved the social and educational diversity of the students he served and their various needs were a constant challenge. He helped in all subject matters with an emphasis in math. He also kept GRAD open before and after school for students that didn't have a study hall. In 2000, he was assigned to a regular ed freshman team and taught math for Team One. During this time, he organized the freshman class to band together and win the pep assy spirit stick twice! Soon after Mrs. Grassino requested his help by playing Daddy Warbucks in the 2003 drama production of Annie. For the next 3 years he played various parts in subsequent dramas and musicals. In 2006, the GRAD center was directed by DESE to be taught by a certified teacher. Thanks to Julie Bobbitt Brakefield (who informed him of this pending change) he again became the GRAD Center Supervisor with the help of regular and special education teachers and various para-professionals. They provided tutoring help, make-up testing, and other educational help with a strong emphasis in math.

He coached junior football from 1996-97, then was a JV and Varsity volunteer coach from 1997-2003 with Paul Haug, Steve and Bob Fisher, Scott Surgener and many others. In 2009, he was asked to take over the drama program. He accepted the position even though he was working toward his master's degree most evenings. It turned out to be one of the most exciting and rewarding decisions of his teaching career. Following his mantra of 'go big or go home', he produced and directed 4 stellar musicals (GREASE, WIZZARD OF OZ, ANNIE, AND BEAUTY AND THE BEAST); all of which enjoyed huge success and sell-out crowds. He also directed 4 dramas including "The Odd Couple", "12 Angry Jurors", and "Any Number Can Die". In 2017, he was placed back in the regular ed classroom teaching Alg 2 and Geometry once again. He retired in 2018 with 7 years of long-term subbing and 18 years of certified teaching for a total of 25 wonderful, rewarding years. He finished his Master's + 15 in school administration in 2012.

He has been a DJ for 35 years and a wedding officiant for 30 with 75% of his clients being former students and co-workers. He DJ'd school dances, sock hops (after football games) and lunch room sing-a-longs during homecoming and spirit weeks. He's been providing music for special needs programs like Next Step for Life, Tim Tebow's Night to Shine (a formal dinner and dance) for almost 10 years and he Emcee's the Jefferson County wide Special Olympics at Desoto High School every year. He also volunteers at Hero's Care (an organization that provides food and numerous services for our veterans and active military personal).

He's been married to his beautiful bride Tina for 49 years and had two children Andrew (2000 grad) and Melissa (2001 grad) and has 9 wonderful grandchildren ranging from 4 -22.

He boasts that he has had at least 8 former students that have chosen teaching as their career path with three of these teaching mathematics 😊. Nick McDaniel and his wife Michelle both teach at Poplar Bluff high school and Nick is the

drama sponsor and director. Nick was his student director on many productions. Andrea Biondo also teaches math. Many former drama kids are pursuing their craft in Hollywood (make-up and production), community theater, cruise ship entertainers, and St. Louis city entertainment clubs. Another former student Matt ‘the Rattlesnake’ Lesch has toured Europe and the U.S. keeping the ‘blues’ alive and well. He recently has been seen in Blues magazines and received Blues magazines best up and coming bluesman award. He just released his newest album, ‘Cuts like Ice’. He is also a ‘Hall of Fame’ inductee tonight!

One of the favorite things in Mr. V’s career was seeing the light of understanding come ‘ON’ in student’s faces when they finally grasp a concept they’d been struggling with for so long. He still receives letters, e-mails and texts from former students thanking him for the impact he has made in their lives.

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Stephen A. VanHoogstraat moved from South St. Louis to Fenton and the Northwest School District in 1965. He attended Murphy Elementary, North Jefferson Junior High, and Northwest High School, graduating in 1973 in the top 10% of his class.

During high school, Mr. VanHoogstraat was deeply involved in student life. He served four years on Student Council, participated in football for four years, and served one year each as basketball and baseball manager. He was a member of FTA and FBLA, where he was voted “Mr. FBLA” at a conference meet. He also participated in Drama Club, served as Senior Class President, and was runner-up for Mr. Northwest. He often reflects on his high school years as some of the most meaningful and enjoyable of his life.

Following graduation, he enlisted in the United States Navy. He completed two deployments aboard the USS Lang (DE-1060), homeported in San Diego. During the final years of the Vietnam War, the Lang provided primary protection for the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea, delivered naval gunfire support to troops in Vietnam, participated in the evacuation of Saigon, and assisted in the rescue and retrieval of the SS Mayaguez—marking the last official battle of the war in Southeast Asia. He later served four years as an anti-submarine warfare sonar specialist during the Cold War. He was honorably discharged in 1979.

After his military service, Mr. VanHoogstraat worked for 17 years with the Veterans Administration at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, caring for the final resting places of thousands of service members, including many with whom he had served.

He began substituting at Northwest High School in 1991, transitioning to full-time teaching in 1995 while attending night school. He earned his teaching degree summa cum laude with a special emphasis in mathematics. From 1995 to 2000, he directed the GRAD Center (Getting Real About Diplomas), an educational support system for students, where he provided tutoring and academic assistance across subjects, with a strong emphasis in math. He maintained extended hours before and after school to support students without study halls.

In 2000, he joined a freshman team teaching mathematics and fostered strong class spirit, leading the freshman class to win the pep assembly spirit stick twice. In 2003, he began performing in school productions, including portraying Daddy Warbucks in *Annie*, and continued acting in multiple productions over the next several years.

In 2006, when the GRAD Center required certified leadership, he resumed his role as supervisor, collaborating with regular and special education teachers and paraprofessionals to provide tutoring, make-up testing, and academic support.

Mr. VanHoogstraat also contributed significantly to athletics and activities. He coached junior football (1996–1997) and served as a junior varsity and varsity volunteer coach (1997–2003). In 2009, he accepted the role of drama sponsor while completing his master’s degree. Embracing his philosophy of “go big or go home,” he produced and directed four highly successful musicals—*Grease*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Annie*, and *Beauty and the Beast*—as well as several dramas, including *The Odd Couple*, *12 Angry Jurors*, and *Any Number Can Die*. In 2017, he returned to the mathematics classroom teaching Algebra II and Geometry. He retired in 2018 after 25 years in education, including seven years as a long-term substitute and 18 years as a certified teacher. He completed his Master’s +15 in School Administration in 2012.

Beyond the classroom, Mr. VanHoogstraat has served as a DJ for 35 years and a wedding officiant for 30 years, with approximately 75% of his clients being former students or colleagues. He provided music for school dances, spirit weeks, and community events, and has supported special needs programs such as Next Step for Life and Tim Tebow’s Night to Shine. He also serves as emcee for the Jefferson County Special Olympics and volunteers with Hero’s Care, an organization supporting veterans and active military personnel.

He and his wife, Tina, have been married for 49 years. They have two children, Andrew (Northwest Class of 2000) and Melissa (Northwest Class of 2001), and nine grandchildren ranging in age from 4 to 22.

Mr. VanHoogstraat takes great pride in the many former students who pursued careers in education, including several mathematics teachers. Others have found success in drama, entertainment, music, and beyond. Among them are Nick McDaniel, now a drama director and educator; Andrea Biondo, a mathematics teacher; and blues musician Matt “The Rattlesnake” Lesch, an award-winning performer and Hall of Fame inductee.

Perhaps the most meaningful reward of Mr. VanHoogstraat’s career has been witnessing the moment when understanding “clicks” for a student. He continues to receive letters, emails, and messages from former students expressing gratitude for the impact he made on their lives—an enduring testament to his dedication, passion, and service.

The Northwest Alumni Association is proud to welcome Mr. Steve VanHoogstraat into the Distinguished Educator Class of 2026.