

COMMUNITY CLOSEUP

# Accomplished administrator

## LT coordinator helps families navigate special education

By Jane McMaels  
STAFF WRITER

Matt Wanzenberg knew he wanted to be a teacher long before he entered high school in Gainesville, Fla.

"I'm the fourth generation of educators on my mom's side and both my parents are teachers," said Wanzenberg, a Lyons Township High School administrator at the north campus in La Grange. "I thought I wanted to go into gifted education."

As a freshman in his high school's future educators club in Florida, he volunteered in a classroom of gifted students.

"I was bored to death. They did all their thinking internally," he said. "Then I filed in for a friend in a self-contained classroom, and I fell in love with it."

"It was an amazing thing to watch the learning that went on. I knew what I wanted to do."

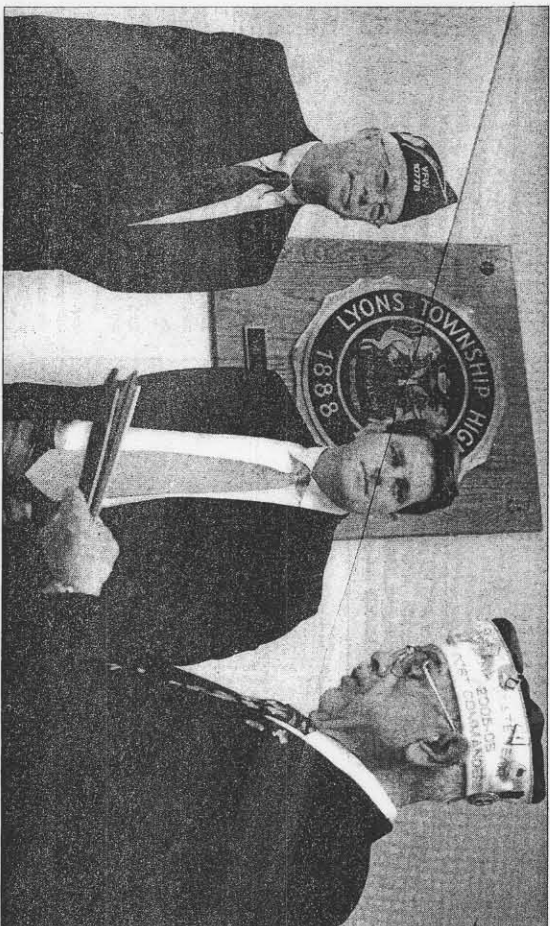
Wanzenberg said he's energized after finding his niche in special education services as LT's program coordinator for juniors and seniors since 2003.

"It's the perfect combination of kid time and cerebral thinking outside the box," he said of his job. "I absolutely love it."

Parental involvement and an atmosphere of teamwork are what Wanzenberg appreciates most about his position.

"It works here at LT. It's not a contentious environment," he said. "Everyone comes to the table with the kids' interest at heart."

"Parents put their trust in the school, and we handle that respectfully. There's such pride and involvement in spe-



Matt Wanzenberg (center) receives honors Monday as Teacher of the Year at Lyons Township High School. Fred Rodriguez (right), former post commander of the Western Springs American Legion, detailed Wanzenberg's accomplishments as Vince Hurni, current post commander. (Doddgs photo by Ruthe Haug)

Surrounded by family photos and boxes of student files, the Wheaton resident makes his home away from home on LT's second floor near the bell tower. Directly outside his office window is the school's bell from 1888, which rings ceremoniously each June.

"I would be easy to get lost in all these files, except for that knock at the door," he said, excusing himself to talk briefly with a student.

About 12 percent, or 550 students at both campuses, have an Individual Education

Plan, which serves as a legal contract for services.

Wanzenberg has been recognized both for his effectiveness as an administrator and top-notch people skills with two awards in the last six months.

Monday, the Western Springs Veterans of Foreign Wars Memorial Post 10778 presented the father of two with the Teacher of the Year award for 2006-07. His wife, Anne, and 3-year-old daughter, Kate, attended the board room ceremony; the couple's son, Will, 6, opted for kindergarten.

In March, LT officials recognized the administrator with

the Vita Plena award for his contributions to the school.

"He's so knowledgeable, so personable and yet, so efficient," said Superintendent Dennis Kelly. "He works so well with parents in helping them navigate the system. He's good at dealing with the small problems."

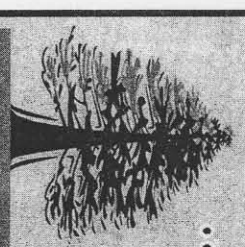
Wanzenberg completed education majors in physical and mental impairments and a master's degree in transitional services planning at the University of Florida.

He taught special education students for four years in Florida, was involved in

Special Olympics and met his future wife, Anne, on a trip to the Galapagos Islands.

While he completed a doctorate in administration focusing on special education law and finance, the couple married and later moved to Wheaton. Wanzenberg worked as an administrator for the La Grange Area Department of Special Education and Naperville schools before taking on challenges at LT.

"That's what I love about his job. I'm not a black-and-white guy," he said. "The gray intrigues me; a lot is open to interpretation."



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