

# ‘Mary Ann World’ ending at CHS

## School principal’s secretary retiring after 30 years

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COVENTRY — Mary Ann Cantino is giving up her front-row seat after 30 years in the school district.

From her desk in the high school front office, she has watched thousands of young Coventry students enter high school young and insecure only to emerge years later as mature adults, Cantino says. It might be a big school, but it has a small town feel, she insists.

Calling her the “Coventry High School icon,” Superintendent Kenneth DiPietro announced Cantino’s retirement at the school committee meeting last week.

Cantino has worked with twelve different principals since arriving at the high school. “Principals either learned to work with her or they didn’t last,” DiPietro said with a touch of humor.

And it wasn’t because she is hard to work with, as current Principal Michael Hobin insists. To him, Cantino has been a fantastic employee, a discerning mentor and a wise friend, he said.

Her overwhelming characteristic is her spirit of charity towards all the students, Hobin said. “She takes every underdog under her wing and she is a real advocate for these kids,” he said. “What I like most is that when she feels strongly about something, she comes in and voices her opinion to me. She doesn’t tell me what to do, but she causes me to be very reflective about my decisions as a principal. I know I can trust her because she’s seen it all.”

Under any circumstance, Cantino is always positive, he added. “I call it ‘Mary Ann World,’” he chuckled. “Just today, a



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**It was announced at the school committee meeting last week that Mary Ann Cantino, principal's secretary at Coventry High School, who has served the Coventry school district for 30 years, will be retiring.**

kid got detention and she gave him a hug before he had to come in here to call his parents. That’s what I mean. When Rome is burning around her, she stays calm.”

When Cantino first started working in Coventry, she didn’t know a soul in Rhode Island, she says. She started working at the old vocational school on Foster Drive in 1980 and moved to the high school seven years later. For her, the job has meant many wonderful relationships.

“I truly feel blessed that I found a job where I could be happy coming in every day,” she said. “I’m glad to be retiring, but I’m not counting down the days until I leave.”

As the principal’s secretary, Cantino is the point person for everything that happens in the building.

While being interviewed, she demonstrated her multi-tasking ability by answering the phone, returning calls on the in-school radios, answering students’ questions and making photo copies for teachers — all while never losing her train of thought as she talked about her job.

A big part of her job is listening to people when they come in and directing them to the right person, she said. Sometimes they just need someone to listen to them.

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"A lot of my job involves remembering what it is like to be a parent or a student," she said. "I try to treat people as I would want to be treated."

Cantino is also charged with doing all the purchasing, bills and cash accounts for the high school, she said.

She loves interacting with every group of people at the high school, Cantino said. "I love seeing how many of our former students are now teachers here — it's like a family."

Another thing she enjoys is watching all the young administrators who come to Coventry High School to gain experience and then go on to be principals all over the state, she said.

Students at this high school can always find support, she added, and she enjoys watching that unfold. "When a student is struggling, I always see teachers, teacher assistants, kitchen employees reach out to them — if a child is receptive

to help, they will get it. This school has not lost its small town feel."

But the biggest part of her goal, Cantino says, is to look for the good in everyone — not just the best students. "I want to be an advocate for students. They need to be told that they're doing a good job, that they can do a good job. My job is to see the goodness in people and point it out to others. I have a front row seat on all that happens in this building."

There were times during her career where she really felt like the glue, she said. "With all the changes in principals, sometimes I felt like I had to hold it together for the students and teachers, year to year."

But as she approaches her 23-year mark at the school, Cantino is ready to leave at the end of this year because she trusts the current leadership.

"I couldn't leave it in better hands," she said of Hobin. "We have the best teachers, the best administration." After the high

school clears the hurdle of re-accreditation this spring, she will be confident to move on, Cantino said.

She's looking forward to spending more time with her children and in-laws and especially her grandchildren, Cantino said.

With her free time as a retiree, she does want to volunteer somewhere in town, she added, but she's going to let everything settle for her first year of retirement.

"I'm really happy that she'll be able to spend more time with her family," Hobin said. "These grandkids are the world to her. But these are big shoes to fill; she's really my right arm. Everything I ask her to do is done to perfection and she's just such a great, great person."

She has promised to help train the new secretary who takes her place after her last day on June 30, Hobin said.

And just so she doesn't fall too far behind on what's happening at the high school, Cantino has told Hobin that she will fill in anytime they need help in the front office.

