

# County school superintendent has followed life-long dream

KINGMAN – Mohave County School Superintendent Mike File knew he wanted to be an educator since he was a child.

“My mom was a teacher and an administrator in the primary grades,” he said Friday, Oct. 20. “She was a hard-working single mom back in those days in Pennsylvania. Back in the 1960s and ’70s, I saw what she did, working with the kids. Teachers were thought of highly in those days. She was an inspiration to her students, some of whom I grew up with and are still friends today. She retired about three years ago.”

File was born and went to school through middle school in Lewisburg, Pa., at which time he moved to Selinsgrove. After graduating high school, File went to East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania with an elementary education major.

“I had played a lot sports in high school,” he said, “football, baseball and wrestling. I played football in college. The area near the university was great in that there were ski resorts everywhere and lots of places to hike, hunt and go whitewater rafting.”

File graduated with a Bachelor of Science in education and came west.

“My first teaching job was at Mount Tipton School in Dolan Springs in 1984,” he said. “I was a Los Angeles Rams and Phoenix Suns fan and I just always wanted to move west. I’m glad I did. I love it here.”

File worked in Dolan Springs for 12 years.



Mike File

“I started out as a kindergarten teacher,” he said. “I taught kindergarten for five years. That was a great experience in that everyday was different. In 1989, I became principal of the school and in 1993 I became district superintendent. We were able to build the new school in ’93. It’s hard to believe that school is 13 years old already.”

In 1996, File ran for Mohave County superintendent.

“I won that election by 22 votes,” he said, “and took office in January of 1997.”

“What I like about this position is that no day is ever the same,” File said. “We deal with a multitude of services to schools; mostly problem solving. The crux of the job, and the biggest statutory responsibility, is to be the fiscal auditors of the schools. A lot of people think this office oversees every aspect of the schools, but that is an incorrect perception. We do, however, oversee the fiscal spending of the schools. We make sure the taxes are collected and received into the Treasurer’s Office; we receive a

report for that. The schools make their budgets and do expenditures and we make sure they are coded appropriately and that they don't overspend their budgets. The everyday operations of the schools are coordinated by the individual school boards, administrators, teachers, etc.

"I tell people I have one of the greatest jobs in the world," File said. "The teachers and administrators are wonderful and we have great relationships. I listen to real horror stories from other Arizona county superintendents who don't have those kinds of relationships with their districts. I'm glad to be in Mohave County."

One thorn in the garden was the Colorado City school district.

"Back in 2001, when the prophet ordered his people to take their children out of the schools," File said, "we had some problems. I saw the vouchers coming in and a red flag went up. I said, 'Wait a minute. You guys said you just lost 1,000 students and you are down to 200 children and you still have 154 employees. That's not a good ratio.' I had worked at a school of 200 students in Dolan Springs. They only had 309 when I left. The Colorado City school should have no more than 24 employees.

"That situation went through almost five years of dealing with some really crazy stuff," he said. "The Arizona Attorney General's Office and the state superintendent were involved and the school went into state receivership.

"I was just up there yesterday (Thursday, Oct. 19)," File said, "and things are looking very good. The environment – atmosphere – in the school is now learning rather than everyone wondering what is going to happen next. They are up to 400 students now and doing very well.

"One nice thing about this office is being able to work on programs to help schools, teachers and children," he said. "We've developed a professional development consortium with Sue Fleishman as director. She has done a great job in offering staff development in reading, math and science to teachers throughout the county. That allows us to offer training here rather than having to send people to Phoenix and spend money for travel, room and board. We are saving a ton of money that can go back into the classroom for supplies, teacher salaries and other needs.

"We now have a reading specialist, Sharon Bay, who provides training in reading in a collaborative effort with the state Department of Education," File added. "At our next meeting in November we will present a program on teacher mediation. In every profession you have situations where people butt heads. This program will give teachers an avenue to mediate situations and give them someone to talk to and help work out problems. When teachers are less stressed, they are in the classroom providing a better education to students."

Parent participation is the key to each student's healthy learning environment, he said.

"Schools are where children go to learn. But learning never stops. Parents can keep right on teaching just by talking to their children about what went on at school each day," File said. "Parental input helps a lot. The schools are there for parents to go and help out, if they want, at any time. We want parents to ask about their children's progress. They can come in and view their children in school. They may see things that will help them and they might just see some things that will make them feel really proud.

"And volunteers are always welcome at the schools," he said. "Parents and grandparents can come to school and read to children or help teachers grade papers. They

can go to district board meetings and get involved. There are many ways people can help us help their children.”

File is proud of his staff and their accomplishments.

“I came into this job and inherited an extremely knowledgeable staff. Phyllis Eaton, Debbie Davis, Bob Joiner and Carol Sadie are very professional. I hear a lot of good comments from the community and from school district staff. Everyone in the department does a great job. And, as far as the county goes, the progress has been incredible. I am extremely pleased with the present professionalism. The county has gone from when nobody knew what anyone else was doing to the extremely organized policies we have today.”

File lives in Kingman where he coaches Pop Warner football, parks and recreation basketball and Little League baseball.

“I don’t hunt that much anymore,” he said. “I play golf and cook. I like to ride my Harley and also enjoy riding quads with my children.”

File has a 10-year-old son, Dylan, who “is a big sports guy,” and a 7-year-old daughter, Ashlee, who “loves to read and do gymnastics.”

“They are my life,” he said.