

# LEARN BY HEART

## Spotlight on Peggy Ferguson & Food Services

Making sure children and young adults are getting the nutrition they need can be difficult. For Peggy Ferguson, Director of Food Services at Bridgman Public Schools, feeding 900 students two meals a day, five days a week, is just part of the fun.

Each day, Ferguson and her team of eleven work to meet United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutritional requirements, provide curated meals for those with dietary restrictions, and deliver meals to students who are in quarantine due to COVID-19 across Bridgman Public Schools. Add in the occasional snow day, and Ferguson and her team have their work cut out for them.

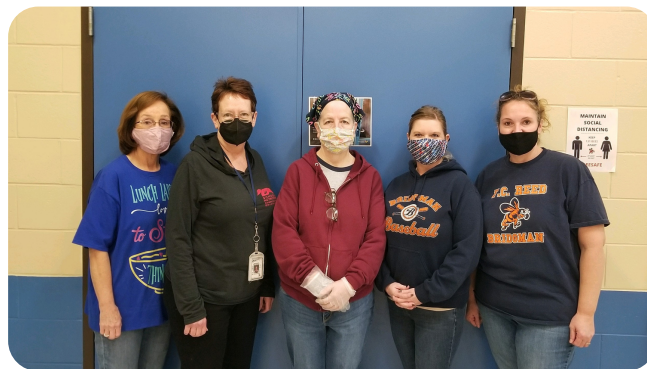
The Food Services team puts thought and care into each meal they prepare for students at the district. With about forty students who have mild to severe food allergies, or the “Super Stars” as the team calls them, there are specialty items and specific preparation needed during each meal. Special food items, such as gluten free bread, are not sold through traditional school lunch suppliers so a trip to the local grocery store is needed.

The preparation of meals for students with food sensitivities is critical. For example, sandwiches for students with gluten allergies are made first. These students cannot risk a crumb from regular bread getting on their sandwich. Not only does their food have to be prepared separately from the rest, but it also needs to be stored separately.

Students affected by allergies and dietary restrictions appreciate the extra effort from the Food Services team.

“Mrs. Ferguson and her team helped me a lot with dealing with my Crohn’s disease,” said F.C. Reed Middle School student, Alex T. “They went out of their way to get some different lunches for me so I won’t get sick and so that I don’t have to keep making my own lunch. This helps me out so much and I appreciate this act of kindness so much.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an effect on school provided meals, too. On any given day, there are students that are at home in quarantine due to



### F.C. REED MIDDLE SCHOOL FOOD SERVICES TEAM

(L to R: Karen Herrman, Peggy Ferguson, Robin Weingart, Robin Johnson, and Julia Abbatoy)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an effect on school provided meals, too. On any given day, there are students that are at home in quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure or illness. Ferguson and her team prepare and deliver five days of meals to students in quarantine.

“I always knew that Peggy held special talents in the realm of food service,” said Lori Graves, Principal at Bridgman Elementary School. “Never did I imagine that she could meet the needs of an entire student population by serving thousands of meals. Peggy has the caring heart that drives her to do what is best to meet every need. She devotes countless hours to make sure there is no child who will go hungry.”

During a recent snowstorm that led to unexpected school closings, Ferguson and her team had to pivot so that no food went to waste while students were not in school. Instead of using frozen broccoli that was on the menu before the weather closings, Ferguson told her team to use up all the fresh produce they could.

“I used to have a catering company and restaurant before this and this is ten times harder. I have an amazing staff. I couldn’t have gone through any of this without them. They have just been so supportive and they absolutely love the kids,” said Ferguson.

Bridgman Public Schools is incredibly thankful to have a Food Services team that meets challenges head on, provides students with healthy, quality meals, and helps each student get the fuel they need to Learn by Heart!