

Chippewa Valley grad helps raise trip funds for popular teacher



Educator Jim Murphy and Kelsey Lievens, a 2009 graduate of Chippewa Valley High School. Lievens began a GoFundMe page to help Murphy take a trip to Ireland when she learned of his pending retirement. Photo -- KELSEY LIEVENS

By Nicole Tuttle, Contributing Writer
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After 35 years of working with high school students, one would think Jim Murphy has seen everything.

But there is one thing, or rather one place, he hasn't seen: Ireland.

Murphy said he began his teaching career working two and a half years at a private school before coming to Chippewa Valley High School in 1981.

He was originally a special education teacher, but in the early 1990s became a coordinator of a work-study program to place special-needs students in internships or jobs. Murphy said he assists 100 students between Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township and Dakota High School in Macomb Township.

“It all depends. Some have paying jobs. A lot of times I have kids work, like high school kids, working in elementary school classrooms, if they want to work with kids. I have had some teachers who are very kind. They let them come in, and the kids usually go in there and do a great job. They learn a lot,” Murphy said.

Kelsey Lievens, a 2009 graduate of Chippewa Valley High School, was one of the students Murphy assisted through the work-study program. Lievens began her career working with children through the program, working at an elementary school in the Chippewa Valley Schools district. She has since worked in day care and is currently a nanny.

“I could not have done it without that first job,” Lievens said.

When Lievens learned Murphy planned to retire in January 2016, she decided to do what she could to assist him in accomplishing a goal he had talked about since she was a student -- a trip to Ireland.

“I am Irish,” Murphy said. “It is just something I’d really like to do. My Irishness is a big part of me.”

On Oct. 23 Lievens began a GoFundMe page at gofundme.com/mrmurphy. As of Nov. 18, \$5,860 of the \$6,000 goal had been raised by 142 people in 26 days.

“It was the biggest and best way to show what he had done, how many people he actually touched,” Lievens said.

Lievens hopes to be able to present Murphy with a check in January 2016.

In addition to his work with special education students, Murphy has also served as a class advisor for the 10th grade since 1981 and been a Key Club advisor for 20 years. Murphy coached junior varsity and freshman baseball before moving into coaching boys varsity baseball for 16 years, winning two league and district titles.

Murphy said he plans to remain involved in Chippewa Valley post-retirement.

“The thing I like most is being around kids. They get a bad rap. A lot of them are great kids. For the most part, they will work really hard. Some have a harder time with certain things. Really, if you give them a chance, they come through,” Murphy said.