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# Briarcliff's new principal: It's the people that make a building a school

By [Samantha Brix](#) | August 25, 2011 in [Education](#), [Featured Stories](#), [News](#)

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COURTESY PHOTO | Patricia Nugent is Briarcliff Elementary School's new principal. She brings over two decades of education experience to the job.

Patricia Nugent, a former assistant principal in the Riverhead School District, has taken over as Briarcliff Elementary School's new principal in Shoreham-Wading River. She has replaced Jane Ruthkowski, who served at the helm of the school for three years and resigned to take a job in the Hauppauge School District.

Ms. Nugent took some time to tell Northshoresun.com a little about herself and her plans for Briarcliff.

**Q: Where were your last few positions, and how many years have you been in education in total?**

A: My previous administrative positions include assistant principal at the elementary and middle school levels in Riverhead School District, and as a coordinator for reading through a Reading First grant in the South Country School District. Prior to my administrative work, I taught reading in the Smithtown School District and was a reading recovery teacher for first-grade students in the Huntington School District. For most of my professional career, I was an elementary education teacher and taught third-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students in the Huntington School District, as well as kindergarten students at the Early Childhood Center in Woodhull Elementary School in Huntington. The position as Principal of Briarcliff will mark my 21st year in education.

**Q: What will your first priorities be as principal of Briarcliff?**

In the first few days as principal, I've become familiar with the building and procedures that have been established. It is important to me to maintain the safe and nurturing environment that exists here. I met several of the teachers and staff members, as well as Briarcliff families. I want to spend the initial weeks as the principal getting to know everyone and learning about their experiences at Briarcliff. I've begun to have conversations with teachers about instructional practice and programs at Briarcliff. I will continue to meet with teachers to discuss student achievement and how I can influence and support their efforts to increase student progress.

**Q: Briarcliff Elementary was shaken a bit earlier this year when the school closed for a week due to an unsafe roof above the gymnasium. Students attended classes at the other two elementary schools in the district for that week. Though the roof repairs are on their way to completion, what will you do to ease parents' worries about safety at school?**

A: Preparation for the opening of school is well on its way at Briarcliff. The construction in the gym is progressing. The procedures that were established by the previous principal and the Briarcliff staff are excellent and appropriate for children in kindergarten and first grade. Safety is a priority to everyone at Briarcliff. As all school staff does at the beginning of each year, we will review procedures regarding safety at our first faculty meeting.

**Q: If the gymnasium and attached library, which have been unoccupied since March, cannot open in time for the start of school, where will students have gym class and where can they go for library time?**

A: We anticipate the construction of the gym to be complete by the opening day of school. A large classroom was utilized as the gym in the spring. If necessary, we would use that space again. As for the library, teachers bring their students to the library for book exchange. If that isn't possible, a selection of books would be brought to the classroom. So if necessary, we would use the same procedures that were used in the spring but it would only be for a short period of time.

**Q: Are there any initiatives you'll look to implement at Briarcliff?**

We will continue the Bucket Filling program (a program meant to build self esteem among students). It is an important component to our character education program and very appropriate for young children. I'm interested in expanding the project based on learning that was initiated last year when the PTA provided Briarcliff with new computers. Integrating literacy instruction with social studies, science and technology engages young children. Kindergarten and first grade children are naturally curious when exposed to new topics.

**Q: What do you look forward to most?**

A: I look forward to school starting and seeing teachers, staff and students in the classrooms. Briarcliff is such a unique school, having been a mansion, and it's located in a beautiful setting. I was a teacher for many years and I know it is the people that transform a building into a school. In my short time as principal, I have come to understand how special Briarcliff is to the Shoreham-Wading River community. I am thrilled to be their principal and look forward to a wonderful year.

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