



Andrea (left) and Andy Beardsley pose together in front of their Ellsworth home on July 8. Andy and Andrea taught at Ellsworth High School for 26 years. PHOTO BY TAYLOR VORTHERMS

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Beardsleys leaving after 26 years with EHS

July 14, 2015 by Taylor Vortherms on Cross-Country, Sports



ELLSWORTH — Every semester Andy Beardsley assigns his class “Romeo and Juliet,” he hears the same line from students:

“There’s no such thing as love at first sight.”

“Oh yeah?” The Ellsworth High School English teacher and legendary cross country coach will ask before playing a tape for the

room full of teenagers. "Listen to this."

"I just met this girl," begins a message Andy recorded of himself some three decades ago — the day he met his future wife. The voice of a smitten 19-year-old spends the next 10 minutes raving about her beauty and love of "Lord of the Rings."

"She's amazing," Andy says in the recording. "And I'm going after her."

Five years later, Andy married the girl who his students now know as their science teacher, Andrea Beardsley. After 26 years of working together at EHS, Andy and Andrea are moving to Virginia to live closer to Andy's brother, Scott.

"We'd honestly thought about doing something different before," Andrea says. "But this all is happening really fast."

A plan took shape in mid-May when Andy, 51, and Andrea, 49, attended Scott's graduation ceremony at the University of Pennsylvania. He had just earned his Ph.D. in educational leadership.

"Andy and Scott are very close," Andrea says. "For their entire adult lives, they've lived on different continents."

Scott, who is just 10 months older than Andy, is in the process of moving from Belgium, where he worked for a management consulting firm in Brussels. He will begin his new job as dean of the University of Virginia Darden School of Business in August.

"Scott is really good at making people push themselves," Andrea says. "During our trip, he asked us, 'Why don't you do something different? We can make this big life change together.'

"That's what got us thinking."

Two months later, Andy and Andrea have committed to the move. They are leaving July 28.

The couple sit at their kitchen counter in their Ellsworth home, poring over photo albums and sharing memories. Andrea points to a picture, taken of the two shortly after they began dating, in which

Andy is holding a novel. "That's a Tolkien book," she says.

When asked what they'll miss most about Ellsworth, Andrea's eyes turn red.

"Are you going to cry?" Andy teases her.

"No, shut up," Andrea smiles, looking up to keep tears from falling. "I can't help it. It is sad! It's a happy-sad thing."

Andy and Andrea's journey to Ellsworth began in 1983 before they had even met. Though they both had family roots in Blue Hill, Andy moved away in middle school, and Andrea arrived in 10th grade. She graduated from George Stevens Academy.

Their paths crossed at Bates College in Lewiston when Andrea caught pneumonia her first month there.

"I was stupid as a freshman," Andrea says. "I ate donuts and didn't sleep. I got horribly sick."

Meanwhile, in Blue Hill, Andrea's mom expressed concern over her daughter's health to a good friend, Andy's grandmother. Andy, a sophomore at Bates, consequently received instruction from his grandma to check on Andrea.

"OK, Nana," Andy says he responded. "I'll go meet this girl."

Andy knocked on Andrea's dorm room door and was greeted by a tall, intimidating man with his arms crossed. It was Parents Weekend, and that was her dad. Andy slinked past him to meet Andrea.

Small talk between the two about where they each grew up quickly uncovered one major connection: Andy and Andrea both had lived in the same house in Blue Hill.

Andrea doesn't have a recording of her thoughts the day she met Andy, but she does have a mental image of him walking out of her room.

"He had a little brown cap on, and he was limping because he had hurt himself," she says. "While watching him walk away, I remember specifically thinking, 'I'm now at the age where I am

meeting people I could end up marrying.

“I could end up marrying that guy.”

Andy and Andrea have five children, two of whom they adopted six and a half years ago from Ethiopia. They have taught their oldest sons and watched them both graduate from EHS.

“Andy and I actually don’t see each other that much at school,” Andrea says. “We run in different circles.”

Their days overlap through their students. Andrea says kids will often tell her, “Mr. Beardsley told a story about you today.” Or Andrea will occasionally use Andy as an example in her anatomy class to perhaps explain the cardiac output of a runner.

“We share common students, and that’s how we interact,” Andrea says. “One of the main things we try to establish is a rapport with the kids. I think in that way, we have similar teaching styles.”

Andy and Andrea fell in love with each other, as well as with teaching, over their three years taking education courses together at Bates.

Andy, a year older than Andrea, graduated in 1986 and entered graduate school at the University of Maine-Orono while Andrea finished up her last year at Bates. Andrea then worked in Portland as a teacher at Deering High School until Andy earned his master’s degree.

With their education behind them, their lives together could finally begin. They moved to Ellsworth in 1988 after Andrea accepted a teaching job at EHS. Andy applied to five different high schools in Hancock County, all of which didn’t hire him.

To get by, the newlyweds worked at the Colonial Motor Lodge. Andrea served as a receptionist nights and weekends while Andy cleaned rooms full time.

Andrea recalls one particularly busy night when a woman checking out of the hotel offered her some advice:

“Dear,” Andrea mimics the visitor. “You seem like a very

intelligent young woman. Why don't you continue your education so you can do something beyond this?"

"Actually, I'm a teacher," Andrea replied, adding she had earned her bachelor's degree from a small, selective liberal arts college.

The woman persisted: "Well, uh, maybe if you had an advanced degree..."

"My husband has his master's," Andrea cut her off. "He's cleaning toilets down the hall."

A position opened up at EHS in 1989 when a group of young, newly hired teachers, including Andrea, couldn't handle the oversized population of problematic students.

"We're talking at least 10 boys who were 17 years old, physically violent and still freshmen in high school," Andy says.

Andrea — the veteran teacher of the bunch with one year of experience — met with staff members to find a solution.

"So they hired Andy to be the muscle," Andrea says, laughing, while Andy pretends to flex his arms. "Which, to anybody who knows him, is extremely funny because he's the sweetest, most compassionate person."

"He would just stand at the back of the room looking big and scary."

Later in the school year, the EHS head of the English department took a leave of absence, and Andy filled the position. Then, he never left.

"It's funny how things happen for the best," Andy says. "When you get rejected or something bad happens, and you're all upset about it. Then, you end up thinking, 'I'm really glad that didn't happen.'

"If I had been accepted at one of those other schools, my whole career path would have been different."

Two and a half decades later and the job search was back on.

After returning from their trip to Pennsylvania in late-May, Andy and Andrea began applying to schools in the Charlottesville area.

Andrea — Hancock County's 2014 Teacher of the Year — scored a position as a chemistry teacher at Albemarle High School within days of beginning her search.

"I have a very positive reputation here at Ellsworth," Andrea says. "From a professional point of view, I want to challenge myself to start fresh and see if I can develop that same reputation later in my career."

The Beardsleys emphasize repeatedly that their decision to leave has nothing to do with Ellsworth.

"We feel blessed to have been able to teach in the Ellsworth school system," Andrea says. "It's an amazing system."

Alone in his classroom in late June, Andy packed up photos and awards accrued over his 26 years coaching cross country and track at EHS. A gifted athlete himself, Andy has coached some of Maine's greatest runners, including Louie and Joey Luchini, Steve and Corey DeWitt, Ben Shorey, and, most recently, Aleta Looker and his nephew Dan Curts — all of whom went on to compete on a national stage.

"I just feel really lucky to have had so many outstanding runners," Andy says.

Andy and Andrea had only just begun informing friends and family of their decision to move. They had quit their jobs and bought a house in a Charlottesville neighborhood centrally located so their kids can walk to school.

Everything had just about fallen into place.

It took Andy nine hours to clean out his classroom. Surrounded by bare walls and stacks of memories, he received a text message late that afternoon. The principal of a private school he had applied to work for, St. Anne's Belfield School, wanted to interview him for an English teaching position.

Andy got the job the next day. He will also serve as assistant coach of the school's cross country and track teams with head coach Sintayehu Taye, who, coincidentally, was a star runner for Portland

High School.

“It’s scary, and it’s exciting,” Andy says. “I’m going to be a new teacher and a new coach where nobody knows me.”

But the Beardsleys are not saying goodbye forever. They plan on returning to Ellsworth for two months every summer.

“We’re not selling the house,” Andrea says. “We want this to still feel like home.”

Andy and Andrea Beardsley are hosting a gathering before they leave at their home Thursday, July 23, from 4 to 7 p.m. Call 667-7128 for more information.

 Bio

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Taylor Vortherms

Sports Editor at The Ellsworth American

Taylor Vortherms covers sports in Hancock County. The St. Louis, Missouri native recently graduated from the Missouri School of Journalism and joined *The Ellsworth American* in 2013.

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