

# Teacher's holiday cheer and enthusiasm going a long way at Westwood Senior

*Described as a 'force of light,' she is making a difference, one Spirit Day at a time*

**DANIEL SUCAR**  
The 1019 Report

Holiday cheer is in full swing in Hudson, as teachers and staff at Westwood Senior High School travelled across the region earlier this week to drop off gift cards to about a dozen families in need.

The \$200 Walmart cards were purchased thanks to proceeds raised from pizza lunches, as well as a donations bucket distributed during recent school activities.

"COVID derailed the plans for our usual holiday initiatives," explained school principal Dion Joseph. "So, we wanted to come up with an alternative that could still help out the local community."

The move caps off a year of goodwill at the high school, which saw students clean up trash around Sandy Beach, raise money for breast cancer research and rake leaves on the grounds of the Vaudreuil-Soulanges palliative-care centre.

Behind all this generosity is teacher Catherine Hogan, who Joseph describes as "a force of light" who rallied the school's 600 students together during dark times.

"When the pandemic hit, she was a fantastic presence in getting the kids to forget about the problems going on in the world," Joseph said. "They bought what she was selling wholeheartedly, and you saw the difference she made in the building."

In conversation, it's apparent that Hogan lives and breathes school spirit. She talks about her love of Westwood with enthusiasm, her pitch only getting livelier as she describes how organizing activities is her way of supporting students in a time where masks, physical distancing and hand sanitizer have become part of daily routines.

### Offering support by organizing

"For me, it's all about making sure that the school is a place the kids enjoy being in," said Hogan, who – fittingly – was bestowed the title of "Most School Spirit" by students in their yearbook last year.

The 48-year-old has been teaching at Westwood's senior campus for the past four years, but says the pandemic showed her just how far she was willing to go to boost the morale of her community.

After the onset of the first wave in March of last year, Westwood was forced to cancel extracurricular activities, field trips and after-school clubs – leaving little wiggle room for Hogan to work her magic.

So, she got creative.

With the help of her leadership classes, Hogan doubled down on the school's long-running Spirit Days, which invite faculty and students to dress up according to specific themes. Think cowboy hats and tall boots for "Wild Wild Westwood Day," and flip-flops and scuba goggles for "Beach Day."

But it doesn't end there. The English teacher also took over Westwood's morning announcements, sprinkling her charm and infusing the airways with her enthusiasm. She used the platform to spotlight student accomplishments, and even held a couple of school-wide Bingo games.

### Communicating is key

"These initiatives might seem small, but it's always the little things that make people feel part of a community," she said.

According to Hogan, these little things are about more than maintaining a positive atmosphere; they're also invaluable to those who are having difficulties adjusting to new realities, struggling with low motivation or simply unsure of how to thrive in times of chaos.

"The last two years have been really difficult on students, and I hope that the impact of all this has allowed them to just be kids again," Hogan reflected.

Added Joseph: "What she's got going on is really special. And, more than that, it's making a real difference here."

In the new year, Hogan plans to continue finding out-of-the-box ways to unite people in an unusual time. She hopes to specifically turn her attention to organizing more grad activities, to make amends for how Grade 11 students will likely be saying farewell without a prom.

And even though the future seems poised to be filled with ever-changing



Daniel Sucar, The 1019 Report

Teacher Catherine Hogan is leading the Westwood Senior High School community through dark and uncertain times.

health guidelines and uncertainty surrounding new COVID-19 rates, the instructor remains confident that all those in the Westwood community will be able to band together and weather the storm, one Spirit Day at a time.