

## LIVING THE DREAM

By Linda McKee

"What's *your dream* Ms. McKee?" one of my students asked.

Chuckling to myself, I thought, "My 'dream job' is to work with special needs kids and dolphins!"

It was the same fantasy I had shared over and over with my best friend. Then one night she called and asked, "Do you know a place like that *actually* exists?"

That was more than two years ago, and at the time, the staff at Portage Middle School was reading the book "The Dream Manager." When my principal, Jane Rentschler, heard about my aspiration, she encouraged me

to go for it. Applying for an internship at Island Dolphin Care in Key Largo, Fla., was completely out of my "comfort zone," but I was ecstatic when I received the news I had been accepted!

It was an amazing experience. Children come from all over the world with disabilities such as Autism, RSV, Down's Syndrome, Asperger's and Cerebral Palsy to take part in this unique dolphin program. As a special education teacher I thought I had pretty much seen the gamut, but at IDC I saw children with disabilities I had never even heard of. Children who resisted traditional therapy at



Portage Middle School teacher Linda McKee outside Island Dolphin Care in Key Largo, Fla., where she completed an internship over the summer.

home would do similar activities with the dolphins and not even realize they were working! In addition, I was delightfully surprised to work with children from Poland, Puerto Rico, Germany and, of course, the U.S.

I had so many astounding experiences; it's hard to say which one was my "favorite." Every day was like Christmas. I was on the docks beside the dolphin trainers every day, in the classroom using the latest assistive technology devices, helping kids make art projects, learn-

ing a new language (Polish), and, of course, there's always swimming with the dolphins. If that weren't enough, veterans, widows and children of veterans, children in foster care and children with cancer came for special camps. What could be better than hearing the giggles of a 6-year-old who is suffering from the effects of chemo? I am so thankful for this phenomenal opportunity and can't wait to go back!

*Linda McKee is a special education teacher at Portage Middle School.*



Linda gets a kiss from Bob the Dolphin.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE FROM SUMMER BREAK?  
SEND IT TO [KRISTA.STOCKMAN@FWCS.K12.IN.US](mailto:KRISTA.STOCKMAN@FWCS.K12.IN.US).