

By [Starla Pointer](#) • Staff Writer • July 8, 2019 

Jami Fluke: Still an educator, still a Pirate

DAYTON — Although she's setting sail on an unexpected, even uncharted, course, Jami Fluke is still a Pirate at heart.

Fluke, who steered the Dayton High School ship since 2011, is switching jobs. In a newly created position with the Construct Foundation/Innovate Oregon, she will be training other educators to think and teach differently in order to provide all students a better experience.

But she'll also be involved at Dayton High as a parent and a spouse. Her youngest daughter, Maddie, will be a junior at DHS, where she plays softball for the Pirates; and her husband, Dave Fluke, will continue teaching there. She said she has the best wishes for the staff and students she's leaving behind.

“Those who stay will keep the ship going,” she said, “and those who move on will plant the Pirate spirit

elsewhere.” DHS has “a lot of pirate analogies,” Fluke noted affectionately.

She was an educator in Dayton for 22 years. She had been high school principal since 2011 and, before that, principal of the junior high. When the district faced a budget shortfall, she and other educators took on added duties — in her case, she became principal of both secondary schools.

For decades, Fluke would have said she’d rather walk the plank than leave Dayton schools. She had found her treasure there, and expected to stay until she retired.

Her life changed in March, when she faced a sudden decision: The district’s superintendent told her on March 11, a Monday, that on Tuesday he would recommend to the school board that her contract not be renewed.

She had a choice, an attorney told her, of living with that blemish on her record or resigning from the job she loved. It was opening day of softball season. She attended her daughter’s first game of the year and watched her hit a grand slam homerun. She cheered, even though, unknown to her family, she was crying inside.

Fluke resigned the next day. She said she’d stay through the 2019-20 school year, though, and board members said they’d consider rehiring her if she made changes the superintendent suggested — all involving petty incidents, Fluke said later.

Students protested her impending departure. Community members and fellow educators packed board meetings in April, May and June to argue on Fluke's behalf.

"I don't know how I would've survived without that support," she said. "I couldn't be more proud of the people I work with and the community."

She said she was proud, too, to see people put their beliefs into action, such as by filing to run for school board. They showed a courage she wants to see in her students.

At school, it was business as usual. After school was harder; it's fortunate, she said, that being a principal is such a time-consuming job, because it kept her mind off her troubles.

Her Christian faith helped her cope.

"I have a really strong faith," she said, "but it had never been tested to this level, where you have to surrender control."

As soon as news of her resignation broke, Fluke was swamped with cards, calls and other messages of support. One of the calls came from Gina Condon, CEO of the Construct Foundation, with whom she'd been working for five years as Dayton implemented an innovative education approaches.

The project, called Innovate Dayton, casts education more in the mold of a technology business than in its

traditional groove.

Participants are encouraged to look at challenges from all angles and discover sometimes-radical solutions, re-evaluate and revise, and learn from mistakes. They're encouraged to dream and create, moving forward all the while.

Dayton High piloted the Construct/Innovate program. It was the first school in Oregon to host breakaway training, which teaches educators to think differently. More than one-third of the district's staff voluntarily went to the training three years ago.

"It was game-changing," Fluke said. And afterward, "we were on fire."

Fluke and another administrator, Roger Lorenzen — retired DHS principal who has returned to work in the high school — also took part in a training at Stanford University's Design School. The training, called "School Retool," teaches school leaders how to implement better practices.

"School Retool came to Oregon because of what the Innovate program was doing," said Fluke, who went through the one-year program with principals from Newberg, Willamina, Dallas, Portland and other districts.

Each time the cohort met, she said, members examined particular classes and asked how they could be better

delivered. Then they went back to their buildings and tried it.

Since then, about 60 other Oregon administrators have gone through School Retool.

And she has gone on to several “Hacktivation Nation” events with other program alums. They used the design skills they’d learned to develop new educational techniques.

The first time Condon called from the Connect Foundation, it was to offer support. The next time it was to offer a suggestion.

The foundation was planning to hire someone, she said, to help other schools benefit from the Innovate program and the School Retool program. Someone with experience in both programs and a background in high school leadership would be ideal.

“She knew I would never leave Dayton,” said Fluke, who had expected to retire from Pirate Nation. But Condon also knew the situation had changed.

Fluke couldn’t say yes at that point; she was in turmoil. But she helped design the new job, and she considered it while keeping her focus on being principal.

Finally, in late May, she realized it was too exciting an opportunity to pass up.

She submitted her resignation May 31. Staff members and students honored her June 9 at Dayton High's graduation — the last one she would oversee.

Her new job as “Innovation Ambassador” will take her to school districts around the state, as well as to Construct Foundation's Portland office. She'll also work from home at times.

Her first day, July 22, will be spent at Stanford University in California, where she will train to lead School Retool workshops. She'll return to Oregon in August to coach at a Hacktivation Nation event hosted by Construct.

After that, she will train principals in School Retool and work with those who have already been trained and now are implementing the ideas in their districts.

“It's not a program, it's a mindset,” she said. “I'll be helping them apply design concepts to their own school culture; to find out who will run with it and which areas are right for them to try.”

With Innovate Dayton, DHS applied that mindset largely to its technology program. Other schools might use it with science, math, agriculture, culinary arts or other curriculum, she said.

“Each school will look at their culture and assets and determine how to make it work,” she said. “They'll bring students on board and let their voices be heard. They're brilliant when you let them solve problems.”

Fluke said she wants other schools to experience what Dayton has through the Innovate program.

“The joy of seeing what students and teachers do ... every student and every staff member has value, and when you let them, they show they are brilliant,” she said.