

Peter E. Herman
16 Pike Hill Road West Topsham, Vermont 05086
802 439-5804/Fax 802 439-5874 email pherman@tops-tele.com

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

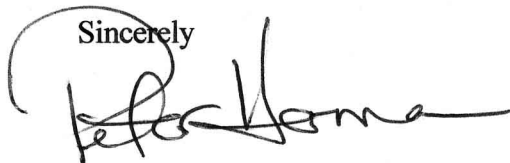
It truly gives me great pleasure to write this letter of reference for Mary Alice Osborne to do whatever she wishes to do. I have known Mary Alice for 5 years or more, both as a friend and as an outstanding educator in our local elementary/middle school. Her talents and personal character are an impressive blend, and she has made an enormous difference to our school and to the children who have been fortunate enough to be in her orbit.

Mary Alice's official title in school is librarian and head of our talent development program, but that doesn't explain the half of it. In the first role she has taken what too often is a mundane activity and made it the focal point of the school. What was a rather institutional room full of books is now a homey environment full of books, pets, pictures, and computers where kids can lie on the floor, drape themselves over comfortable couches, or sit inside the massive trunk of a reading tree out of Tolkien. Mary Alice is always available to read a book, help with a project, or explain how to use the Internet, and she has enlisted a group of dedicated volunteers to help her keep things going.

Initially the talent program was to be a traditional gifted and talented effort that helped a select group of academically proficient students move beyond the normal curriculum. It's still that, but Mary Alice decided that all kids have talents that can be developed and changed the direction of the program, calling it Talent Search and its multitude of activities the SPARK. In SPARK kids play chess, work on small engines, create robots, sew clothing, put on plays, and work on class projects. Almost half the school is now involved in SPARK activities, most of which take place in students' free time during or after school. One of its hallmarks is to figure out what ought to happen and then adjust the normal routine to make it so – for example the kids in the chess group meet in the library during lunch hour and bring their lunch trays with them so they won't miss a beat.

In short, Mary Alice is an enormous resource for Waits River Valley School and would quickly become the same wherever she goes. My only request to her next organization is that you give her back to us.

Sincerely



Peter Herman
Vice Chair, Waits River Valley School Board;
Chair, Orange East Supervisory Union Board
Vice President, Vermont State School Board Association