



## Celebrating Our Staff

"This school is really CTE supportive and I've gotta tell you, I'm really impressed with the kids here."

-Mark Wagar, W.F. West Construction/Woodworking Teacher

**Mark Wagar: Helping Students Build Pathways**



### Finding His Own Path to Education

Mark Wagar went into the field of education to become the type of mentor that he needed when he was young.

"The reason I wanted to become a teacher was that when I was in school, I didn't feel like the teachers did a great job connecting with students and helping them find pathways," Wagar said. "I thought, 'that is something I can do as a teacher'."

This is Wagar's first year at W.F. West as the construction and woodworking teacher. Growing up in Centralia and graduating from Centralia High School, Wagar said teaching was not his first career aspiration. For the first 10 years after high school, he worked at the TransAlta Centralia Steam Plant. After a few years, he took a job with a construction company to learn the home building trade. "I decided I wanted a job where I could work for myself," he said.

It was only after experience with these two industries that Wagar started to think teaching might be a good fit for him. He learned about the [Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) business and industry pathway](#) to becoming a teacher. This is an option offered in Washington state that allows those who are working in a business or industry to use that experience to teach in their area of expertise. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from [St. Martin's University](#) and a Master's Degree in Leadership from [City University](#).

He taught in the the Steilacoom School District and New Market Skills Center and then worked in administration for eight years. He ended up taking a five-year break from education, during which he continued to do home building. Wagar still works in the home construction field during his time off, mostly doing home remodeling projects. After five years working in construction only, Wagar decided he missed being in the classroom and went to work for the last two years for a tribal school in LaPush. He said he enjoyed that school but he has lived in Tumwater for the last 30 years, so the commute was a strain on his family.



### Helping Chehalis Students Find Their Path

Looking for a job a little closer to home, Wagar saw a listing for the construction and woodworking teacher position at W.F. West High School. Being from Lewis County, Wagar said he was familiar with the area and thought it could be a good fit for him. He said what surprised him right off the bat was that though there had not been many class offerings in the shop in the last few years, many students already had a fair amount of skills in the area.

"This school is really CTE supportive and I've gotta tell you, I'm really impressed with the kids here," he said. "In a healthy learning environment there's collaboration between teachers and administrators and the students are eager to learn and that's happening here."

The W.F. West wood shop had been under-utilized in the last few years because the school did not have a dedicated woodworking and construction teacher. Career Tech teacher Randy Smith had been covering classes in the auto shop, metal shop and wood shop. W.F. West Assistant Principal Mark Westley praised Smith's willingness to keep students learning while the district has worked to get new teachers in place. "Randy was able to keep it open, which gave us a foundation," Westley said of the wood shop.

With Wagar on board, Westley said the work now is to build a program where construction students get to have real-world construction experiences. Westley said that teachers with Wagar's amount of career experience are rare so he feels confident he will be the right person to begin building this program.

"The job now is to start putting things in place for construction so kids enter the program and build those needed skills and they work toward being part of a construction class that does projects, either on site or off site," Westley said.

Wagar said he would like to eventually be able to work with construction students in an environment similar to a construction site where they build something like sheds or tiny homes.

"If we can find the funding, or the resources, there's a lot of different projects I'd like to do," he said.

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**Chehalis School District**

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