

# Decorated Preschool Educator Going Strong 47 Years Later

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By Kathy Grantham – Throughout its history, Westchester County has been blessed with many outstanding men and women. Nancy Brophy, founder, director and owner of the Tom Thumb Preschool in Mohegan Lake, is among that group.

Becoming a leader doesn't spring from a vacuum; character is formed as an amalgam of life experience at home and at school. Brophy's school years were spent in the Canal Zone, Panama, where she attended a multiracial and bilingual comprehensive high school.

Under the auspices of Wayne University, she toured 11 countries in Europe, then accepted a two-year teaching position at a very small international school in Peru, teaching all academic subjects in grades one through eight.

At a United States Army dependents' school in France, she taught seventh and eighth graders. Returning to the United States, Brophy continued to teach junior high students in Massachusetts and at Copper Beech Middle School in the Lakeland School District.

I first wrote about Brophy when June 4, 2004 was proclaimed "Nancy Brophy Day" by the Westchester County Board of Legislators, celebrating "her commitment to the highest standards of excellence during the (then) 36 years of nurturing and teaching children to be 'the best they can be'."

This Proclamation was the first public recognition of her work.

Recently, on May 29, 2015, Brophy, now in her 47th year, was again recognized. **The Yorktown Chamber of Commerce** honored her as "*2015 Business Person of the Year*" at a dinner dance at Villa Barone. During that evening she was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation by the Town of Yorktown for "her dedicated and invaluable service to our community." Also, the NYS Senate presented a proclamation "to Nancy Brophy who has exhibited the true spirit of the prestigious Business Person of the Year Award through her impressive success". This was followed by a Citation from the NYS Assembly recognizing her as an outstanding individual worthy of this title.

Perhaps most amazing is that Brophy was given another Day of her own. May 31, 2015 was declared "*Nancy Brophy Day*" in Westchester County by the Board of Legislators. I recently sat down with Nancy Brophy and asked her a few questions.

[As a child, were you like the kids you work with at Tom Thumb?](#)

Nancy Brophy: Yes. Playing is their work. And through play children find their strengths as I did.

Do you prefer working with young children (not adults)?

NB: Working with young children is most gratifying for me. I am part of their educational foundation.

Are you ever bored after 47 years. (Doing the same thing)?

NB: My staff and I never do the same thing. We always change, refine and add to our program. They say "If you love your work, you will never work a day in your life." I do NOT work and I am never bored. The challenge is to provide children with the best experiences possible. When you race for excellence—there is no finish line.

How many children did you start with so many years ago?

NB: In 1968 I had 53 children enrolled at Tom Thumb. Now I have 250 children that attend school all day two, three, or five days a week. In June we graduated 110 five-year-olds.

Have your prices changed?

NB: My prices have not increased much at all. However, my academic and enrichment programs have expanded beyond what I ever thought possible with music, dance, physical education, drumming and science specialists.

Do you ever work with adults?

NB: The only adults I work with are teachers and staff. I have and have had the best, and most dedicated, staff in the world. They all make my dreams for children come true.

Have you noticed changes in children's behavior over the years?

NB: I really do not see behavioral changes. Children respond very well to safety rules and treating others with respect. Tom Thumb children are taught a motto: "Let everybody play."

When will you retire?

NB: Retirement is not in my vocabulary. And if I could be sure I would be as sharp as this reporter who is asking me these questions – I would be ecstatic. This same reporter interviewed me 11 years ago when I received a Proclamation for Nancy Brophy Day in 2004 from the county of Westchester.

In your opinion (self-examination) are you as dynamic and full of zip as you were 47 years ago?

NB: My staff tells me that I have too much energy and should cut back on coffee.

How do you stay fit? Do you work out at a gym?

NB: Working with children every day is in itself a workout. Racquet ball, tennis, golf and dancing are all my passions.

Do you advertise Tom Thumb on radio or TV or in newspapers?

NB: Yes, I advertise everywhere. But parents recommending Tom Thumb to their friends and relatives is the best kind of publicity and I thank them so much.

If you were starting out today, what is the competition?

NB: I don't think that Tom Thumb's Educational Program has any competitors.

Have you ever had to turn people away because you already had a full enrollment?

NB: Yes, that does happen and that doesn't please me. I want all children to have a great experience. However, if parents don't register early they may not have the days they desire.

If you could do your life over, would you choose the same path?

NB: Absolutely, I am the luckiest person in the world because every day I see, love, and teach The Next Great Generation of Americans – Our children.

Brophy is a visionary in the field of education. She lays the foundation necessary for strong and healthy minds that are then ready to learn and to cope with all that life has to offer.

How fitting that “Nancy Brophy Day(s)” have recognized the tireless effort of someone who could be a template for all dedicated and devoted teachers of our children.