

Identical-twin teachers have their school doing double takes

The sisters say pure luck is behind their working at the same middle school

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VIRGINIA BEACH — Jeanette teaches science. Shawna teaches English.

Jeanette drives a stick shift. Shawna has an automatic.

Jeanette likes her room clean and orderly. Shawna is, well, less meticulous.

But none of these differences help students at Larkspur Middle School tell the difference between identical-twin teachers Jeanette and Shawna Boehmer.

"You do get confused," said 13-year-old Shontea Hawkins. "If you don't see what they're wearing in class, you can get them mixed up."

Even Principal Don Harvey has trouble telling the 22-year-old sisters apart. Sometimes, he has to sneak a peek at their ID badges.

He's not the first Virginia Beach administrator to wonder who is who. The Boehmers have lived here for 20 years. They graduated from Tallwood High School in 1994. They both went to Longwood College in Farmville, enrolling in its teaching program.

They never intended to start their teaching careers at the same school. To them, it was luck.

"It feels like we're at home," Jeanette Boehmer said. "It's nice to have her down the hall."

Harvey said he hired the Boehmers because of their achievements as student teachers. He said two experienced and well-respected teachers supervised the twins.

"They said they were the best student teachers they had seen," Harvey said.

"The faculty wanted them both," Harvey said. "The faculty encouraged me to hire them, which is somewhat unusual."

At the beginning of the year, the sisters made a point of telling their students that they had an identical twin. That way, students wouldn't feel bad if they thought their teacher was ignoring them by not saying hello.

It was particularly confusing during open house. Eighth-grader David Millard said he thought he was talking to his science teacher but . . .

"She didn't know me," he said.

He was talking to her sister.

Shawann Hunter, 13, who takes English with Shawna Boehmer, hasn't officially met Jeanette Boehmer, but he has said hello to her in the hallway.

"I call her 'Miss Boehmer Boehmer', or 'Miss Boehmer two,'" he said.

Slowly, students are finding ways to tell them apart. Hawkins and Jessica Meyer, both eighth-graders, said Jeanette Boehmer seems to dress more like a teenager while Shawna Boehmer appears to wear more makeup.

The adults at Larkspur have figured out an easier way. Shawna Boehmer parts her hair in the middle. Jeanette Boehmer parts it on one side.

"I have a beauty mark on my face," Shawna Boehmer said.

Most striking, though, are their polar personalities.

"We are very different," Jeanette Boehmer said. "We are like night and day. We think differently. It's probably why we get along so well."

One thing they share — with each other and many of their students — is an affinity for contemporary actor Leonardo DiCaprio.

"He's sexy," Jeanette Boehmer said. "We both think he is."

Separated by just a hallway, and four minutes at birth, the sis-

ters say it's nice being so close even if they never see each other during the day.

"I feel like my other half is with me — down the hall," Shawna Boehmer said.