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COMMUNITY VOICES: The best job in the world

By Paula Dahl

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It's been 26 years since I jumped in my car and moved to Bakersfield from San Diego. I must admit I was not sure what I had done or what I was thinking, all I knew was someone had taken a chance on me and I had an opportunity to do what I love: coach.

Over the past quarter of a century, I have had many incredible experiences working with remarkable women from all around Kern County. I have experienced success and failure. I would have to say I am most grateful for the failures because this is where my greatest growth has taken place. That's the thing about coaching, you never quite arrive. There is always something new to learn, obstacle to face and adaptation to be made.

Coaching can be exhausting and overwhelming. I was terrified as a single woman, moving to a community where I knew only one person and was completely starting from scratch. Over the years I have grown to love Bakersfield. Being a Renegade is a source of great pride. When I accepted the job, I had no idea the rich tradition that surrounded the school. I am privileged to work with remarkable individuals that make my life better every day.

In my office area I have Carl Ferreira, our women's volleyball coach, whom I call Yoda. This man has guided me over the years and is a wealth of knowledge and inspiration. He is cutting edge with his research on developing the mind and having a championship mentality and mentors everyone around him.

Scott Dameron, our women's soccer coach, plays the role of my confidant and lunch buddy. I have watched him coach with nine players on the field and his opponent thought he had 11. This season, he had a team that represented the school day in and day out as fierce competitors and placed more players at the four-year level than ever before.

Then there is Sandi Taylor, who has been at BC the longest and was my first mentor. As our softball coach, she had great success receiving national coach of the year honors. A few years ago, she left our little brain trust to cross the hall and become the first female athletic director at BC. I am in awe of my colleagues across the entire athletic department and the hours they dedicate in developing young adults.

I believe I coach a grueling sport as the season is very long. We compete over two semesters and my players have grit. They are expected to be in at least 15 units of class, commit three hours a day to basketball, five hours a week in study hall, maintain high grades and graduate in two years. I chuckle when I am told this generation does not know how to work or do hard things. Student athletes across the country do it every day. I am blessed to work with some of the greatest women I know. They battle daily to become the best version of themselves on and off the court. I've watched them develop lifelong friendships and learn to sacrifice and compete for each other. I've watched them completely leave everything they have on the floor and fall short and pick themselves up and be ready to compete again the next day for a win.

The greatest part of my job is watching former players achieve their dreams of graduating college, receiving graduate degrees, becoming coaches, professors, nurses, doctors, attorney, engineers, physician assistants, teachers, counselors, mothers and so much more. Two weeks ago, on a Saturday morning, I was sitting at home and received a text from two former players who took the hardwood 20 years ago. The text said, "Hey coach, we are in a pickle ball tournament at BC. Maybe you could come down and watch us play before your game." What a remarkable morning watching these two extremely accomplished women compete. As I left the tennis courts reflecting over the many years at BC, my heart was full of incredible memories and loved that they still called me "Coach."

Come cheer on the Renegades at our next home game 3 p.m. on Feb. 1.

Paula Dahl is the women's basketball head coach at Bakersfield College.