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### Titans in the Making

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# Titans in the Making

Stephanie Hajdu uses her alma mater to inspire elementary students

Story by SARAH (ZELLER) JULIAN '07

When Illinois Wesleyan launched its *Transforming Lives* campaign in May, among the first to learn the news were fourth-grade students at Orchard Place Elementary School in Des Plaines, Ill.

Their teacher, Stephanie Hajdu '06, showed her pupils videos posted on the campaign's web site, offering testimonies from students, professors and alumni about the power of an Illinois Wesleyan education to transform lives.

That message is one that Hajdu shares every day in her diverse classroom as she talks about her own Wesleyan experiences as a way to help her students envision college futures of their own.



**Hajdu (left) and students at Orchard Place Elementary show their Wesleyan spirit.**

college assemblies throughout the year,” she says. “We wear our IWU shirts every Friday and the Illinois Wesleyan flag hangs proudly outside our door. My students have our own Wesleyan cheer that we recite often. Many of my students are beginning to see college as a realistic goal and our motivated to succeed in school and continue their education.”

Hajdu’s elementary students come from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Sixty-five percent qualify for low-income services, and more than half speak a language other than English at home.

“We believe that every one of our students has the innate ability to learn and holds a very bright college future ahead of them,” she says. “It is our dream to make college a reality for all of our students.”

Last year, to help her students visualize their own college experience, Hajdu set up a special partnership with Illinois Wesleyan University.

“Donations from the Alumni Association allowed my students to show off foam fingers and pom poms at our monthly

“I have benefited so much as both a teacher and a person from working with such a diverse population of students,” says Hajdu, who has taught kindergarten and fourth-grade at the school, and is teaching third-graders this fall.

With the help of the Educational Studies Department, Stephanie set up a pen-pal program last academic year so current Illinois Wesleyan education majors could correspond with her students. A few Illinois Wesleyan students even came to visit her classroom last year.

“We are continuing this program this year and are hoping we can have University students come visit my new class of students again,” Hajdu says. “The live visit was such a special experience for students, and they still use the IWU folders they got from the [University’s] Admissions Office.”



**Three of Hajdu's students get creative with their Titan gear.**

Hajdu recently completed an education master’s degree at National–Louis University and earned an endorsement to teach English as a second language. She also was nominated for a Those Who Excel Award given by the State Board of Education last year.

Hajdu is pleased to offer her own testimonial on the power of Illinois Wesleyan to transform lives. “I am proud to have attended IWU and feel like it hand a hand in bringing me the success I have today.”