



Photos by Jack Kurtz/The Arizona Republic

Challenge Charter School's Pam Miller reads a book about fish while Malik Scott acts out the book with a puppet. Below, Greg Miller hands out lunches to Challenge students Nicole Robinson and Tania Lebratti. The Millers run the Glendale Core Knowledge school.

School's vision puts kids 1st

NE Phoenix couple run Glendale charter

By Ofelia Madrid
The Arizona Republic

Greg and Pam Miller are a self-described 24/7 couple.

The northeast Phoenix couple drive to work in the same car. They run a school together. They share an office. A long table separates Pam's side from Greg's side at Challenge Charter School in Glendale. They even have the same matching black leather office chairs.

And although they might differ on choice of computers — she has a desktop with a tulip background, he has a laptop — they both share the same vision for a school: to create a learning environment where the kids came first.

"The vision hasn't changed a whole lot since the eight years we've been here," Greg Miller said.

"We were willing to take the risk to see if we could do it that way. And I think we've been fairly successful."



"I've never worked as hard or as much or enjoyed it as much."

— Greg Miller
Challenge Charter School co-founder

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CHARTER Couple start school in Glendale

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Between them, they've held about 95 volunteer positions in the Paradise Valley district.

Those years spent volunteering paid off in 1992 when Greg persuaded Pam to run for one of three open Paradise Valley School Board seats.

"We didn't spend a dime," Greg said. Later the Millers found out that a grass-roots campaign had been started without their knowledge. Teachers and other community members had created fliers with Pam's name on them and distributed them throughout several neighborhoods.

Pam and Greg decided early on that the charter school wouldn't be in Phoenix. Pam was on the Paradise Valley School District governing board at the time, and she didn't want to have a conflict of interest, so Glendale seemed like a logical place.

On his side of the Challenge office, Greg has a rubber check for \$1 framed on his wall, presented to him by the school for the work he did dur-

ing the first year of the school. During Challenge's first year, Greg still had a full-time job managing an engineering firm and would work at the school from 3 to 11 p.m.

"I've never worked as hard or as much or enjoyed it as much," Greg said.

During the early years, Pam said, they spent about 13-hour days six to seven days a week at the school.

"We would have never made it had we not been doing it together," Greg said as he walked around the campus, which runs from 57th to 59th avenues along Greenbriar Drive. Students run up to hug him, hollering "Mr. Miller, Mr. Miller" if he hasn't waved to them yet.

The Millers' two daughters, now grown, also do work for the school.

Despite all the success, Greg said, there are no plans to expand to other sites.

"It's never been as important for us to grow," he said. "Our job as a charter school was to do something different and do it very well."



Jack Kurtz/The Arizona Republic

Greg Miller hands out lunches to Challenge Charter School students Nicole Robinson and Tania Lebratti.

The Millers look forward to the day when they can spend more time at the family cabin in southern Utah. Pam said they keep several pictures of it in their office because it's the only way they get to see it. But retirement won't keep them

from civic involvement.

"I don't see us ever stopping," Pam said. "I'm not going to go quietly."

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