

Take a walk on the Wyllside

Teacher engages in powerlifting,
cheer team, engineering course

Math teacher Natalie Wyll is in complete control. With what seems like minimal effort, she manages to juggle an array of tasks from running her classes to participating in competitive powerlifting, obtaining a master's degree, coaching cheer and preparing to head the first engineering class that the Eanes district has ever offered.

But every story has a beginning. In Wyll's case, her passion for math sparked her drive to attend the University of Texas, where she studied math and science.

"I was always good at math and science at school, even in elementary," Wyll said. "[But] I really fell in love with math when I took calculus in my senior year of high school. I just thought it was the best thing ever. I loved everything about it. I knew that I wanted to major in something math-related in college, [but] I didn't think that being a math major was very marketable, so instead of deciding to become a straight math major, I thought, 'Well, I'm good at math and science, I'll do engineering.'"

After college, Wyll worked as a structural engineer in Dallas for three years. And yet, something just wasn't right for her.

"I found that I wasn't happy in the professional world of engineering," Wyll said. "I really liked what I learned about and studied in school, but there is definitely a difference between what you do in school and what you do in work. I just felt that this wasn't the right career path for me, even though I really did love engineering. I wanted to take my career in a different direction."

While working as an engineer, she was assigned to help train interns, teaching them the design software used by the company. This got her thinking about teaching as a profession. She began investigating opportunities in education, something that she actually had some knowledge in considering her mother was a teacher.

"My mom knew I wasn't happy at work, but

I had talked about how I had really enjoyed training these interns, and she said to me, 'Have you ever thought about being a teacher?' Wyll said. "[After that], I was like, 'Maybe that would be a good choice for me.' I stayed in engineering for about six to eight months after that and gave it a lot of thought. But [after I] talked with my mom and some other teachers, I decided that I wanted to get my teaching certificate and teach high school math. I really thought back to what I love, so I went back to school to get my alternate certification."

Her teaching career began at Highland Park High School in Dallas, which is very similar to Westlake in terms of the demographics and academic expectations. Soon after, she and her husband relocated back to Austin to stay close to her family. While searching for a new job, she noticed an opening at Westlake that she immediately capitalized on. Having a cheer background, she was also offered a position as assistant cheer coach. Now, after three years at Westlake, she can finally combine her past experience with her teaching abilities to start a brand-new engineering program in the science wing.

However, she also needs to go back to graduate school to prepare for her class while at the same time dealing with her multifarious activities.

"I'm getting a master's degree in science and engineering education through UT," Wyll said. "My master's work will set me up to teach my engineering course next year, which I'm very excited about. I still love engineering, so I really wanted to start a program here."

When she's not focusing on teaching math or prepping her next class, Wyll also finds time for competitive sports. She is an ex-bodybuilder and a current powerlifter.

"I no longer compete in bodybuilding, and I don't train like bodybuilders do because now I'm a competitive powerlifter," Wyll said. "I've competed in powerlifting competitions throughout the years, and that's what I focus

most of my training toward. There are some similar things, but my training is [about] back squats, deadlifts and bench press. I think most people are surprised because I'm a small, petite woman — I don't look like a 'powerlifter.'"

Her history with powerlifting traces back to just after she graduated college.

"I started going to the gym and lifting weights," Wyll said. "I had a friend who lifted, and she introduced me to it. [From then on], I've loved it. I like feeling strong, knowing that if something is over there I can pick it up. I don't need somebody else to pick it up for me. I got it — no problem. I like feeling that my body is strong, healthy and fit. I enjoy competing as it gives me goals to work toward, because I'm a really goal-oriented person. I don't just go to the gym to work out. I go because I'm training for my next meet, and I want to hit this number, this number and this number. I'm pushing myself and always trying to improve and get better."

Wyll relishes breaking certain gender stereotypes.

"It's OK to be kind of a girly-girl," Wyll said. "I like makeup, shoes and shopping, but I also like to get in the gym and work hard and lift heavy weights. You don't have to be a boy to go lift. You're not going to become some big, muscular girl [if you work out]. You can like pretty dresses, and you can go lift weights. Those are not mutually exclusive."

Despite her massive workload and incredibly busy schedule, Wyll keeps pressing ahead.

"I tend to sometimes bite off more than I can chew, but that thought [of having too much on my plate] didn't really cross my mind," Wyll said. "I don't like placing limitations on myself, so if I think I can do it, I'll make it happen. I don't think I realize how hard I am working, because I'm in grad school, cheer, my own personal competitions and just regular class time on top of that. But it doesn't feel like work because I enjoy it."

—Jack Wallace

$$dy = 0$$

$$\cot y + 2y \csc y$$

$$x = e^x \cot y$$

$$\int \frac{1}{u} du = \int \omega$$

try $u(y)$

$$e^{\ln(u)} = e^{\ln(\sin y)}$$

$$u = \sin y$$

$$M = e^x \cot y$$

$$\cot y$$

It all adds up for math teacher Natalie Wyll, who divides her time between math and athletics. Photo by Lucy Wimmer.