

'Learn something': Twin Buttes teacher hits the ground running every day

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 03 January 2020 07:32



Meet Camille's Teacher of the Month: Joshua Otto

Each month, Camille's Sidewalk Cafe recognizes one local teacher within the Gallup area for his or her determination to help students go above and beyond. Prospective teachers are nominated by students who feel they deserve to be recognized.

Joshua Otto, of Twin Buttes Cyber Academy in Zuni, said he has always been interested in studying languages and reading, as well as creative writing.

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BACKGROUND

Born in Fort Collins, Colo. and raised in Kalispell, Mont., Otto attended a Master of Fine Arts Program at the University of Texas at El Paso, where he became a teaching assistant as part of his degree.

“I enjoyed it and was good at [teaching] at the college level,” Otto said.

After years of teaching college students in Oregon and Texas, Otto realized the high school level was where a lot of effective teaching was needed.

“I always knew there was a lot of work to be done, with many students who are not able to write a sentence, or a paragraph properly,” Otto said.

INTEREST IN THE SOUTHWEST

“When I was in school in social studies, we studied Native American peoples around the United States,” Otto said. “I was always struck by the imagery and stories behind the Zuni. Even though it was a limited amount of information, it never left me.”

Otto said he wanted to learn how the imagery he saw in the pictures of Zuni culture came to be. He arrived in Zuni during the summer and said the transition has been smooth.

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“This school, the concept behind it, is a really good one. It’s been easy for me to be enthusiastic about it,” he said.

HIGHER EDUCATION TO HIGH SCHOOL

“Teaching high school requires more attention to the emotional side of the students,” Otto said. “Before, I would just present the information to the students and leave. Now, I’m basically part of their family.”

Connecting with students helps motivate him because they can progress rapidly in writing and literacy with the proper attention and guidance, Otto said.

This is also why he believes in being a mentor and role model for students.

“It only takes one person to champion a student, to really tell them they can do it, for them to succeed for the rest of their life,” Otto said.

THE CHALLENGES AND THE REWARDS

Otto said his words and actions are being scrutinized by his students, which is why he makes sure the students see someone who is a good person and intellectually curious and enthusiastic about learning.

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“My dad told me one time, ‘If you’re ever in trouble, not feeling right about anything, learn something.’ Whenever I feel challenged by something, I pick up a book or step outside and learn something,” Otto said.

Showing students that he supports and cares for them also comes into play when times get tough for them, Otto said.

“I have to be ready to flex from day to day, from period to period, with the emotional landscape of a classroom,” he said.

HOW THE AWARD FEELS

“I was surprised [I was selected] because I’ve only been here for a while,” Otto said. “And then I realized the award was something that was going to honor my whole school.”

Twin Buttes Cyber Academy Principal Zeno Kiehne spoke about the award and how Otto has been an asset.

“Mr. Otto came in with a background in colleges, but I think some of the students were blown away by the academic words he used,” Kiehne said. “I’ve seen a lot of growth in his classes in writing and speaking, and the whole attitude.”

Otto wanted to thank Kiehne and his approach to education; his wife, for being his partner and teammate in life; his students for inspiring him; and the Twin Buttes staff for their enthusiastic and caring approach to working with their students.

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“The message I’ve heard here is, ‘This is about the kids. We love the kids.’” Otto said. “So I regularly tell my kids I love them, and I know that matters to them. They know it matters. It matters.”

Interested in nominating your favorite teacher for Teacher of the Month?

Contact Camille’s Sidewalk Cafe at (505)722-5017 or stop by 306 S. Second St. in Gallup.

By Cody Begaye
Sun Correspondent