

Camille's Sidewalk Café awards 2015-16 "Teacher of the Year"

Written by Story and photos by Andy Gibbons III Sun Correspondent
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More than a week into the 2016-17 school year, few educators in the area had enough time to recall the previous year. School is in session, and there's much to be done to make sure every student and an entire classroom get off to the right start.

However, Camille's Sidewalk Café took a moment on Aug. 20 to appreciate last year's winners of the "Teacher of the Month" awards, as well as to unveil the "Teacher of the Year."

Leaders of the awards committee considered handing the awards out at the end of May or the beginning of June. The owner of Camille's, James Rich, however, recognized that many teachers would like to enjoy their hard-earned summer vacation free from another required meeting to attend, and the awards ceremony was postponed until August, when it would kick off the new school year.

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Teacher of the Year

When local educator Monique Martinez arrived at Camille's, she didn't know what to expect. Martinez was the "teacher of the month" back in February, as reported by the Sun in March.

Martinez was surprised when, out of the pool of victors, she found out she had won "Teacher of the Year."

Rich and others narrowed the pool down to Martinez for many reasons, among which were her close ties to the Gallup community.

Martinez grew up in Gallup, and left for a few years to get her teaching degree before she returned home to put that degree into practice. She'd been teaching for 11 years at Juan de Oñate Elementary School when she received her first award.

"I came back to this community to serve," Martinez said, "not because it's the easiest, but because it deserves it the most."

Martinez said she sees the desire to learn in the faces of her students. By showing them where their education can take them, Martinez hopes that, in the future, her students will no longer have to face their current life struggles.

Martinez's first batch of students, from 2005, begin this school year as high-school seniors and are nearing the end of their educational journey with Gallup McKinley County Schools.

When she reflects on her own educational experience in Gallup, Martinez especially remembers her teacher Karen Pemberton for encouraging her to push herself farther.

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"When a teacher takes interest in who you are and meets you where you are academically, it makes a difference for a lifetime," Martinez said about Pemberton.

Now a teacher herself, Martinez says her strongest ally is her husband, who loves that his wife has summers off — when the two can spend quality time together — but who also knows every bit of help he offers through the school year goes a long way.

"My advice [to husbands and wives of teachers] is to be supportive of your spouse and understand that their day is not just 7 [am to] 3 [pm]," Martinez's husband said. "There are many times that your spouse will be home long after school hours, bring school work home, and have events after school. It's also so important to listen to your spouse, because teaching is a daily grind where no two days are the same, and they need a sounding board."

Martinez's husband also mentioned some of the "jobs" he's had over the years to help his wife. His tasks ranged from making and decorating bulletin boards to fixing things in the classroom. Still, he said, his No. 1 role as a teacher's spouse is to pray for his wife as a teacher.

Rich and others at Camille's Sidewalk Café at 306 S. Second St. want previous teachers of the month to know they can stop by the café during normal business hours to pick up their awards.

The 2016-17 ballots for "Teacher of the Month" will begin for the month of September and can be found near the dessert display at the front of the store.

Story and photos by Andy Gibbons III

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