Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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Meet Camille’s Teacher of the Month: Brooke Menapace

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.

Brooke Menapace, of Rocky View Elementary School, has been to numerous cities and countries during her teaching career, but she was given a challenging, yet rewarding opportunity when she came to Gallup.

BACKGROUND

Menapace grew up in Indiana and started her teaching career in southern Indiana after graduating from Oakland City University, a private university in Oakland City, Ind., in 2005. She attended college for special education and then elementary education.

After teaching in Indiana for three years, she moved to Namibia in southern Africa to teach with the Peace Corps. After her time in Namibia was up, Menapace joined a Fellows Program in the Peace Corps that brought her to Gallup in 2010.

It was researching the Peace Corps Fellows Program that led Menapace to Gallup, a town she was not at all familiar with, she said.

"I had never heard of Gallup before researching the Peace Corps Fellows Program," Menapace said Nov. 15. "The program was with a partnership with Western New Mexico University when they had a branch in Gallup."

WHY TEACHING?

During her high school years, Menapace had a volleyball coach who was also an elementary school teacher. Menapace's first teaching experience came when she assisted her coach in the classroom, she said.

"In high school, I was able to go to an elementary school and help her out," Menapace said. "I always knew I liked working with children, but I didn't know if I would be cut out for the classroom, so that high school experience of being able to visit an elementary school to find out my career path was really helpful."

Menapace said the sense of community that forms throughout the school year is one of the most important aspects of being a teacher.

"You get to make the connection with so many kids and families, and the relationships develop over the school year to a strong little community within our classroom," Menapace said. "It's important to have that kind of family feel in the classroom to know everybody's safe and cared for, so they are able to learn better."

WHY KINDERGARTEN?

The opportunity to teach kindergarten students was not actually Menapace's first choice, she said.

"My first teaching job, I applied for a fourth grade role. I thought it was going to be the perfect grade for me, and they only had a kindergarten opening," Menapace said.

Menapace also spent several years teaching second grade students, but eventually came back to kindergarten and now considers it a great opportunity for the students.

"It's awesome to get kids when they're fresh, and it's the first school experience for some of them," she said. "It's important to set that foundation. Education can be fun, and learning can be a great experience, and when kids feel that in kindergarten, I feel we're setting them up for a great career in education."

THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS

"I can say in my 15 years of education there hasn't been an easy year," Menapace said. "Every year is so different, every class is different. You never know what's going to walk in the door or what you're going to face."

One specific challenge of teaching kindergarten students is working with students who have no prior school experience and thus will need the early learning experiences, Menapace said.

Having to instill numerous early learning experiences into kindergarten students is demanding

enough that Menapace admitted a chunk of her time outside of the classroom is spent preparing projects and lessons for students.

However, this significant challenge lends itself to a significant reward, she added.

“You see such huge growth from August to May,” she said. “With some other grades, you don’t feel that big sense of growth like in kindergarten. You can have kids who come in without any letter knowledge and can leave the classroom able to read.”

WHAT MOTIVATES THE TEACHER

A positive and stable school career is something a lot of students in Gallup need, Menapace said.

“It’s important each of these kids have a teacher that cares deeply, each and every year, to make sure they’re successful,” she said. “Early education is important to set them up for the rest of their life.”

The job is exhausting and takes a lot of patience, but the reward of seeing the kids grow up and have success is huge, she continued.

“At Rocky View, it’s really fun to be in this early learning environment and then see a kid move on to first grade, second grade, and see what wonderful people they are as fifth graders moving on to middle school,” Menapace said. “It’s a rewarding thing for the whole staff to see those kids

succeed.”

HOW THE AWARD FEELS

Menapace said she walked into the office early this week and was surprised when she was told she was named Teacher of the Month.

“It was a really nice surprise to know somebody nominated me and took notice of the hard work we do here at Rocky View,” she said. “I feel this isn’t just for me, but for so many people who support my classroom and help support my students.”

Menapace wanted to voice her appreciation for Rocky View support staff who keep the building running, as well as classroom assistants, the special education department, physical education and art teachers.

“We’re all working together to help these kids,” she said.

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.

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