Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Meet Camille's Teacher of the Month: Deidre Gruber

Each month, Camille’s Sidewalk Cafe in Gallup chooses and recognizes one local teacher within the Gallup area for the Teacher of the Month award. Teachers are nominated for their efforts and determination to help local students rise beyond their expectations. This month, Camille's Sidewalk Cafe recognizes pre-kindergarten teacher Deidre Gruber, of Grants.

Gruber received the news from her boss after school let out at Grants Head Start, where she has been teaching pre-K for the past two years. Gruber felt honored and excited upon hearing the news. She has been teaching more than seven years overall. Originally from Crownpoint, Gruber is Diné. She received her bachelor’s degree in early childhood education from the University of New Mexico in 2016.

“I’ve never been recognized, so it’s an honor and exciting at the same time," she said.

A teacher named Mrs. Glass became one of the role models who sparked Gruber’s interest in becoming a teacher herself. Gruber said she had some “really cool” teachers at an early age.

Then, in high school, she had some inspirational instructors who fed that dream she had as a

girl. She said, “As I watched these teachers, they made teaching fun and helped encourage other kids to do their best." Gruber took those memories and replicated them in her classroom with the 16 students she teaches.

Gruber said the biggest thrill she gets from her job comes when the children enter her classroom every day. The smiles on their faces give her a jolt of joy as they express the delight of learning how to spell their names, recognizing the letters of the alphabet, and practicing other life skills.

“Having that smile on their faces when they come into the class is the best part," Gruber said.

Like any other job, Gruber faces challenges. She points to the lack of recognition for teachers. She says there are a lot of great teachers, but also some who aren’t that enthused about the career, giving a bad name to those who love their teaching jobs. She says that makes it difficult to highlight how many truly great teachers there are.

Another challenge she faces is testing.

Gruber believes test-taking takes the focus off the students. Gruber says you have to train young children to succeed at tests, and that can be overwhelming and hard on some teachers. The pre-K curriculum consists of social and emotional benchmarks that her class must hit every month. Gruber says it’s easy to lose focus on the kids and having fun while still encouraging them reach those standards.

“There are some great teachers who get ding[ed] by the low scores because some kids didn’t do well on test days, but well on other days. That’s not taken into consideration and that hurts most teachers especially at the end of the year," she said.

Despite the challenges, Gruber says she sees herself still teaching down the road, pursuing her education, and hopefully owning her own daycare center.

When she's not teaching, she tries to spend more time with her family, but she says teaching is a never-ending job. "A teacher's job is never done," she jokingly says. "I'm always looking for things to make learning more interesting."

On weekends, she prepares things for the classroom. On outings with her family, she may spot things she can use in her classroom. Her husband jokes that they have 18 children including her own two kids.

The future for Gruber is teaching first grade.

She also shared words of inspiration to those who want to teach.

"Do it. It's the most rewarding job ever. You do make a difference in a kid's life, giving them ideas for the day - just showing them that there are people that love them and care for them."

If you're interested in nominating your favorite teacher for Teacher of the Month, contact Camille's Sidewalk Café at (505) 722-5017 or stop by at 306 S. 2nd St.

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