

Teacher of the Month: Rehoboth Christian High School English teacher moves on to new challenge

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
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Each month, the *Sun* recognizes a local teacher for his or her determination to help students go above and beyond. Anyone can nominate a teacher by emailing the Sun at gallupsunreporters@gmail.com and providing the teacher's name, where they teach, and why they should be selected as that month's winner.

This month's award went to Seth Weidenaar, or "Mr. Dub" as his students call him. Seth teaches high school English at Rehoboth Christian High School but has been teaching at Rehoboth at different grade levels for over 20 years.

PATH TO TEACHING

Part of this longevity is all thanks to a Chicago traffic jam.

Seth grew up in Chicago and did his student teaching there as well. He was sitting in traffic heading to his student teaching job when he got a call from the school's Executive Director asking him to apply for a job out west, and after thinking about it, Weidenaar decided to take him up on his offer.

"I thought to myself, 'There's not a lot of traffic jams [in New Mexico],' so I applied for the job and got it, and I've been here ever since," Weidenaar said.

But it's not just the lighter traffic that appeals to him. Seth said he loves running around the Gallup trails and the outdoor opportunities the area provides.

THE APPEAL OF LEARNING

As for teaching, Seth said his favorite part is giving the students the tools they need in life to be successful.

"My favorite part about teaching is you get to do something different every day, and you're always learning how to live. As an English teacher that's really what we're studying and the different books that we're reading, and the different discussions that we're having is how to live the best life we can. It's just fun to watch students think through that and then get the tools they need to learn and that's always been a fun challenge," he said.

Rehoboth Christian High School principal Dan Meester said he appreciates Seth's willingness to teach his students life skills.

“What I appreciate is he doesn’t want to only teach his kids the content, he also wants to teach them how to think well, how to be better learners, how to be better writers, and not just ‘Well, now I know what happens in this particular book or story,’” Meester said.

Seth originally went to college to study chemistry, partly because he liked the subject in high school. But he lost interest about a year in, and decided to take on an English degree after realizing he liked to construct and win arguments, and that he was good at it too.

Once he’d gotten some English classes under his belt, he decided to take an education class just for the fun of it, and he realized he liked working with students.

ONWARD AND UPWARD

But now, he’s ready to move on to a new challenge. At the beginning of the school year Rehoboth Christian’s Executive Bob Ippel announced his retirement, and he named Meester as his replacement. Meester was involved in the process to find his replacement, and they landed on Weidenaar.

“Sometimes a school is thinking ‘Well, let’s get some fresh ideas from places that are outside our school,’ but our school is so unique in the world of Christian education in terms of the people we serve and the goals and the mission, that having someone who was familiar with all that stuff and had already lived and breathed it and bought into it so deeply was really a compelling thing that made Seth attractive to us,” Meester explained.

He also said Weidenaar’s passion for his students helped guide their decision.

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"I think as a teacher he always kept his students at the forefront; their needs were paramount. It's a great thing for a classroom teacher to do, and now it's just shifting into the role as building leader, but still having that same perspective: what is best for the kids," Meester said. "That's going to guide the decisions we make about how this school works ..."

Seth's wife Tressa Weidenaar teaches at Rehoboth's middle school, and in an interview with the *Sun* she expressed her excitement for this new opportunity for her husband.

"I think he's ready for a new challenge. ... I'm excited [to see him] step into a new role at our school but he's also going to be able to continue to relate to the students and the staff he works with now, and I think that's going to be a big part of what it's going to look like for him next year," she said.

Steve Terborg teaches Spanish at Rehoboth High School, and he said he thinks Seth will make an excellent principal, partly because he already leans on him for advice.

"I think he's one of the smartest people I know. ... I have such respect for him, and I think my colleagues do as well. [in the past couple years] I've looked to him for any questions I have. I would go to the boss for the big things, but if I had a question he was two doors down from me and I would say 'Hey, this happened in my classroom, how would you handle this situation?'" Terborg said.

As for Seth, he said he's excited to continue the collaborative relationships he already has with the teachers at Rehoboth Christian High School in his new position.

"I'm super excited to work with all the teachers we have here at Rehoboth Christian High School. We have an awesome staff who all do really great things. We've built an awesome culture at our school. I'm looking forward to maintaining that culture and making decisions that help and influence that culture," he said.

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