

Del Norte teacher emphasizes independence

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 07 February 2020 10:12



From peeling oranges to picking themselves up when they fall

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.

Thedeous Tah, of Del Norte Elementary School, has taught in the Gallup area for over 20 years at a number of schools. But, he said this was not quite the career he imagined himself having when he started out.

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BACKGROUND

Tah grew up in Church Rock and attended numerous schools in the region, graduated from the old Gallup High School, and then moved on to obtain an education degree from the University of New Mexico-Gallup.

“I really had no intention of ever becoming a teacher until I got stuck in a reading program and started out as a teacher assistant, and moved my way up to becoming a teacher,” Tah said Jan. 28.

This year marks Tah’s 24th in education, he said.

“After my first day in a special ed. classroom, I was worn out and beat down,” Tah said. “I said, ‘Lord, if this is what you want for me, let’s get it going. Let’s start this.’ And I’ve been in education ever since.”

WHY KINDERGARTEN?

Previously, Tah taught second grade, fifth grade, and preschool for about 12 years, and began teaching kindergarten in 2019.

“I’ve seen a lot of gaps coming up with students in their alphabets and numbers,” Tah said. “I

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thought it would be time to move down and help fill those gaps to prevent kids from struggling in school.”

Tah said a lot of his strategies for teaching kindergarten revolve around vocabulary, so he likes to incorporate a lot of local culture into his teaching.

“I do a lot of storytelling,” he said. “I teach using some Navajo stories, and some Zuni and Hispanic stories, too.”

Tah said the 22 students he teaches are having fun and learning, which makes the experience rewarding. His goal is to make sure they are all prepared to move on next fall.

“Hopefully when this year’s up, my kids feel more confident and strong, and feel they have the abilities to go on to first grade and become good readers and writers, and understand math,” Tah said.

Having taught on the north side of Gallup for nearly his entire career, Tah said he has witnessed multiple generations come through the classroom.

“Seeing my preschoolers come up, who are now adults and now have their own children, is really something else to see,” Tah said. “It’s rewarding to know the families from grandparents, to parents, to kids who have their own kids.”

BECOMING SELF-SUFFICIENT

The number one trait Tah hopes to instill in his students is a sense of independence.

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“[It is] one of the rewards, watching them learning how to take small steps, like peel their own orange, advocate for themselves, speak up for themselves,” Tah said. “At the start of the year, a lot of students ask you to do a lot of things for them. But I teach them they don’t have to ask me for everything, that they can do it on their own.”

Tah also used an example of when students are on the playground, if they fall down and are not seriously hurt, to then pick themselves up and then come to him if they need nurturing or a bandage for any injury.

“I really want my kids to be independent and self-sufficient and take care of themselves,” he said.

HOW THE AWARD FEELS

“When I saw I first got selected for the award, I thought it was a friend playing a trick on me,” Tah said. “I thought, ‘who would nominate me for Teacher of the Month?’”

But when Tah arrived at school the next day, he was asked by the principal if he had checked his email because he had been nominated.

“[The nomination] shows I’m doing my job, whether I was nominated by my family or students or the community,” Tah said. “It shows the work I’m doing is leaving a positive impact for my community, whether it’s for kids from years ago or days ago. It tells me I’m doing something I should be doing and that I love.”

Tah voiced his appreciation for the many teachers, principals, and students he has worked with over the years to get him to this point.

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However, there is one particular student that stands out, whom Tah points to as his biggest educator.

“One of my kids in special ed. who has Down Syndrome, his name is Carrad Benally,” Tah said. “When I first met him, he was about 5 years old, and he was the biggest influence on my education. I still see him, and think about how much he’s given me, how much he taught me to become passionate and just not give up on any student or myself.”

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
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