

Red Rock Elementary teacher follows in her mom's footsteps

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
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Jessy Wommack grew up walking around downtown Gallup and going into shops where people from around town would greet her mother, an elementary school teacher, fondly. Everyone knew her name and was excited to see her. Wommack also spent her summers playing school with her dolls and her younger sisters and brother, using her mother's old desks and curriculum.

But she never thought she'd become a teacher.

"I think it was always a part of me, I just didn't know that would eventually be my path," Wommack said in an interview with the *Sun*.

Instead, after graduating from Gallup High School, Wommack joined a program at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque for undergraduate students from rural areas who were interested in pursuing a career in medicine. She wanted to go into pediatric oncology initially, but soon learned the field wasn't for her.

"It turns out I just didn't have the emotional capacity with sick kids," she explained. "It wasn't for me. I saw a kid die of cancer; my first day I had to hold a kid down for epidurals, and I realized I really wanted to work with kids but not in that setting."

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After she graduated from UNM Wommack came home to Gallup for a visit, and that's when her mom convinced her to apply for a job at the Gallup-McKinley County Schools district.

Wommack began her teaching career at Rocky View Elementary in 2008. She worked at the now-closed elementary school for eight years before transferring to Red Rock Elementary, where she's been ever since.

And now, 16 years after she started teaching, Wommack has won the *Sun's* Teacher of the Month award for January.

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In her 16 years at GMCS, Wommack has taught kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade. During her time she has had a variety of coworkers, and two of them took time to talk to the *Sun*.

Georgia Owens retired from teaching in 2020, but she remembers her time teaching second grade alongside Wommack at Red Rock Elementary fondly.

She has an outstanding understanding of children's developmental and educational needs, from kindergarten on up. She's just very clear with what the children need in her classroom," Owens explained. "She's just able to balance the education with the other needs that the children have, like recess. You know, what else does a child need besides just coming in and learning how to read and how to do math."

Owens thought so highly of Wommack that she nominated her for the 2024 Golden Apple Award. Wommack didn't win, but Owens said she has plans to nominate her again for 2025.

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Another coworker of Wommack's has a unique connection with her. Crystal Segura taught first grade with Wommack at Rocky View, but her son also had Wommack as a first grade teacher. Segura said she was one of the best teachers her son ever had.

"She's one of two teachers in his whole academic career that has differentiated things for him to challenge him so he wasn't bored. She knew how to push the high kids and the struggling kids, which is really hard to do," Segura said.

As a coworker, Segura said Wommack challenged her too.

"She always had interesting ways to teach the kids. She always had fun with them. She made me do crazy things that I never would have done if it weren't for her," Segura said.

One of those things happened when the two teachers decided to make piñatas for 45 first graders. The original plan was to do the craft outside, but when a rainstorm started, the duo moved the project inside. Segura called the experience a nightmare and a disaster.

"There's probably still piñata glue in that classroom," Segura said while laughing.

Wommack said her favorite part about teaching was interacting with the kids and their honesty and forgiveness.

"Kids will tell you how it is; they're very truthful, but they're also forgiving and loving. They need you. I know when I go into work every day they want me there," she said.

Wommack said that one of her goals as a teacher is to make sure her classroom is always welcoming.

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I always told myself if I ever did become a teacher, I would want to be the type of teacher the students wanted to have. I never wanted to be one of those teachers where a student walks into the classroom and just hates being there," she said.

Part of how she does that is by bringing her passion into the classroom. She said that's one of the main things a new teacher should be able to do.

"Find what you love and share that with your students. So whatever you love, whatever makes you happy, bring that into the classroom and share that passion, and eventually that passion will drive you," she said.

One of her favorite things to connect with kids about is the video game Animal Crossing.

"My students are always shocked because they play videogames and they don't really believe that people who are older do the same things they do," she said.

To nominate a teacher for the Teacher of the Month award, email gallupsunreporters@gmail.com and provide the name of nominated teacher, what school they teach at, what grade or course they teach, and explain why they deserve the award.

By Molly Ann Howell
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