

Teacher of the Month: Jefferson Elementary teacher continues line of family education

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
Friday, 23 February 2024 00:00



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 Makena Wenning, a kindergarten teacher at Jefferson Elementary. This is Wenning's first year teaching, although she is no stranger to the Gallup area or teaching.

ROAD TO TEACHING

She grew up in Gallup, with her mom teaching preschool at Jefferson and her dad teaching at Hozho Academy. Despite growing up surrounded by teachers – her grandparents and two of her aunts were also teachers – Wenning said she initially wanted to go into speech therapy after having gone through it herself in elementary school.

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However, that dream changed after she got the chance to job shadow a speech therapist during her time at Middle College High School. The job shadowing just happened to be at Jefferson, so she was able to run to her mom's room and cry about the awful experience there.

She spent the rest of the day in her mom's preschool classroom, and she fell in love with teaching that day.

"[I realized] I wanted to be more with the kids instead of just like a pull-out," Wenning explained.

After that realization, Wenning went off to Western New Mexico University to study early childhood education. While she was there, she worked at the university's preschool as an assistant. But when the pandemic hit, she decided to return home.

She became a preschool assistant at Jefferson, and after doing that for two years she completed her student teaching requirements in a first-grade classroom at the school. She finished her degree in May.

WORKING OVERTIME

Jefferson Elementary principal Sasha Blanco-Ramirez said in an interview with the *Sun* it was an easy decision to bring Wenning on as a full-time kindergarten teacher after she saw what she did with the preschoolers and first graders, calling her a blessing for the school.

"I knew from there that she was meant for this school and she was just the right fit," Blanco-Ramirez said.

She continued by praising Wenning for her hard work and dedication.

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“She puts in extra hours; I see her car here all the time on the weekend getting ready for the students. ... She puts in all this extra time to make sure that her classroom is prepared,” the principal said. “She always goes above and beyond to make sure her students’ lessons and resources are ready to go for the week.”

Wenning admitted that she sometimes struggles with creating a work/life balance for herself.

“The hardest part is letting things go at the end of the day. ... I’m a worrier, I tend to worry a lot, so I’ve really been trying to work on my school/life balance,” she said.

When she does have some free time, she likes to clear her mind by knitting. She even recently attended a knitting retreat in Winslow, Arizona. She also makes T-shirts, and often gives them to her fellow teachers. Her T-shirt designs can be found on Facebook at Kena’s Kreations.

ADVICE FOR NEW TEACHERS

Coming from a family chock-full of teachers, Wennings knew what she was getting into when she decided to become a teacher. But she advises anyone who’s considering the profession to do their research.

“I would just know what you’re signing up for. Being a child of teachers, I knew what I was signing up for,” she said. “... Just make sure you’re going into the right profession for the right reasons because these kids need us and if we’re not in it it’s going to affect them.”

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