

Teacher of the Month runs on faith, a passion for teaching

Written by By Babette Herrmann Sun Editor
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Honey Chavez loves her job as a first grade teacher for Uplift Community School in Gallup. And it's likely that her kind, open and honest demeanor played a part in her being nominated, and winning, Camille's Sidewalk Cafe teacher of the month.

"I was pleasantly surprised," she said, when she learned that she was the teacher selected. "My students were so happy for me."

Finding out that she was being honored was just the shot in the arm Chavez needed, as the news brought forth some bittersweet feelings as Uplift, a K-8 charter school, faces imminent closure at the end of the school year.

"It came at the right time," she said. "Everyone is doing their best to keep their spirit going."

And her enthusiasm for teaching comes seemingly naturally. Chavez, 32, said that she first knew that she wanted to become a teacher when she was a teenager. However, before heading off to college, she started a family, and spent quality at-home time with her son Ezekiel, who is now nine.

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Chavez said she earned her Bachelor's degree in early childhood education from UNM-Gallup branch campus, and immediately went to work for Gallup McKinley County Schools before heading to Uplift. It was a homecoming, of sorts, as she did her student teaching at the campus.

She chose to teach first grade, as she feels children absorb information readily at this age, and it's the perfect opportunity for the young pupils to learn new information and set good habits.

But what sets Uplift apart from other schools is that students get to pick and choose topics they are passionate about, Chavez said, yet still meet the state's Common Core educational guidelines.

"We collaborate and work together," she said.

For instance, curriculum is tailored made to address the latest theme – "My place in space." Students are learning the nuts and bolts of air and space within and outside of the earth's atmosphere.

As the quarter draws to a close, students will move onto a new topic. The space topic reached its pinnacle when a representative from NASA visited the school April 4 for an out of this world presentation that addressed space travel to Mars and beyond.

In the recent past, students took a field trip to the Sandia Peak Tramway, and discussed the effects altitude on the body as the tram climb up the side of the mountain. Once on top, they got glimpse of the pollution that blankets Albuquerque.

"They are able to make a direct connection to what they're learning in the classroom," Chavez said.

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Moreover, there are 18 students in her class, and a teaching assistant, which allows for more one-on-one attention. Even students that fall under the special needs category get positive reinforcement and direction.

“Students learn best when they feel valued, and that they’re important ... and needed as a team member,” she said.

Even with the closure of the school looming, Chavez plans on taking what she has learned and applying Uplift’s principles at another school. But, she’s not sure whether she’ll remain locally.

“I am open to ideas,” she said. “God gave me this ability, and I am praying on where [he] wants me to be.”

To nominate your favorite teacher, visit Camille’s Sidewalk Cafe at 306 S. 2nd St., Gallup. Contact: (505) 722-5017.

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