Stagecoach Elementary Teacher Benina Maldonado is Teacher of the Month

With the 2018 school year in full swing, it's time once again to recognize another outstanding individual for excellence in teaching.

Each month during the school year, Camille's Sidewalk Cafe in Gallup recognizes a local teacher as Teacher of the Month. Teachers are nominated by students or those who feel they deserve the recognition for their seemingly effortless, hard work.

Camille's presents the teacher with an award for excellence in their field.

Kicking off this brand-new school year, Camille's congratulates Benina Maldonado, their

September Teacher of the Month.

Maldonado is a pre-school teacher at Stagecoach Elementary who has been teaching 3- to 4-year old's for the past four years.

When she heard news of the award, Maldonado said she thought one of her friends was playing a joke on her and was skeptical. Eventually, the truth of the matter struck, and she was thrilled to be nominated.

"It's a good feeling, a really good feeling to be nominated to win the teacher of the month," she said.

Born and raised in Gallup, Maldonado has been working in the school district for over 15 years. She began as an education assistant at Indian Hills Elementary School, but has always found it a joy to work with children, and hoped to be a role model for them.

Maldonado said she aimed to emulate the role models who helped shape her, like her mom Kathy Maldonado and her grandmother Jean Maldonado. They taught her to be faithful, and always respectful.

"I had good role models when I was growing up as a kid, so I wanted to reciprocate and be a good role model to kids," she said. "Along with my role models, I had good mentors in high school as well, so with that said, it's because of these people that I am the teacher I am today."

With these valuable inspirations in her life, Maldonado sought to pass their values on to others — mainly to children.

She attended the University of New Mexico, where she received her bachelor's degree in elementary education.

Maldonado said she's inspired every day by her children to be the best teacher she can be.

"My kids inspire me to get up every morning to come to work, to play and learn to socialize with them," she said. "They are my motivation; my kids are my drive to be here so that I can teach them to be better people so that they can educate themselves more and be productive citizens."

As for those who wish to pursue a teacher's path, Maldonado suggests teachers and hopefuls continue to strive for their goals. Never change it, she said, pursue it even if it takes longer than expected, and don't ever stop, but keep going.

She said as soon as the goal is accomplished, another should be set in order to keep moving forward.

"Don't let anybody tell you any different — just strive for your goal," she said.

In terms of her own goals, Maldonado hopes to pursue her master's degree in early childhood or special education, as she works with special-education kids from time to time.

For the most part, though, she'd like to further her education to help children reach their full potential. She says it's the pure joy of seeing the kids come to class each day that makes it all worth it, despite the challenges she faces.

Maldonado said her main challenge is testing, applying tests to her kids to make sure they're at grade level or above grade level, to make sure her students are proficient in what they're learning. Testing 3- and 4-year-olds, she said, can be a challenge.

"The testing sometimes is hard to grasp, especially when applying them to 3- or 4-year-olds to make sure they are developing right for their age level," Maldonado said. "But that's just a part

of being a teacher and the kids are worth it."

When another school day ends, Maldonado eagerly awaits the next day of teaching her school children. She said her teacher-of-the-month nomination was heartfelt, warming and a great feeling.

"If you love your job, you don't work a day in your life," she said.

To nominate your favorite teacher for Teacher of the Month, contact Camille's Sidewalk Cafe at (505) 722-5017 or stop by at 306 S. 2nd St. in Gallup.

By Dee Velasco
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