

Meet Camille's Teacher of the Month ReneE Autrey

An old saying goes, "Love makes the world go round." Well, according to Renee Autrey, Camille's Sidewalk Cafe Teacher of the Month, the adage is true — love inspires her anew each day in her kindergarten class at Stagecoach Elementary School.

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

Camille's presents the winning teacher with an award for excellence in their field — and this month, Autrey received the honor.

Autrey, who has lived in the Gallup area for 25 years, earned her Bachelor's degree in elementary education at the University of New Mexico-Gallup.

Like many teachers chosen as Teacher of the Month in the past, Autrey said she was initially surprised by the honor, and then simply couldn't believe it.

But her shock eventually gave way to happiness. She said she never expected such an honor simply for being a teacher.

“I never asked for it, and to me, recognition was not being known,” Autrey said. “But I was so happy when I found out the news.”

A teacher for the past 16 years, Autrey taught first graders for her first 10 years in the field, and kindergarten for the past six.

She said her uncle, himself an educator for some 40 years, inspired her to pursue teaching. When she was young, her uncle often told her about his students, she said, and the desire to become a teacher was planted in her heart.

“I just felt that was something I wanted to do,” Autrey said. “I didn’t know if it was going to work out for me, but I’ve always felt that I wanted to be a teacher, and I enjoy working with kids, and I love being around them. [Laughing] It’s been the perfect fit for me.”

Autrey has an Associate’s Degree in human services, too, but her uncle inspired her to become a teacher instead.

Autrey, who initially taught first graders, said she’s happy to be in the kindergarten setting now.

“I would have said first grade a couple years ago, but I love what I do now,” she said. “I love kindergarten. It was difficult; the transition was hard, because the kids are more mature in first grade. They can do a lot more; I had to adjust a lot of things coming into kindergarten.”

When it comes to challenges, Autrey said many children enter her class unable to express themselves in complete sentences. This challenge of language and expression can make

Autrey's task as a teacher difficult, she said. But despite any hills to climb, she loves what she does.

She advises those who wish to enter the field of education to put their hearts into it and stay determined.

"If your heart's in it, it's worth it," Autrey said. "Just make learning fun for the kids and show them you care about them."

If you're 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. 2nd St. in Gallup.

By Dee Velasco
For the Sun