

Meet Camille's Teacher of the Month: Cecily Langendorf

Each month, Camille's Sidewalk Cafe recognizes one local teacher within the Gallup area for his or her determination to help students go above and beyond. Prospective teachers are nominated by students who feel they deserve to be recognized.

Cecily Langendorf, a first grade teacher at Del Norte Elementary School in Gallup, is February's Teacher of the Month. She spoke to the *Gallup Sun* this week.

THE HONOR OF TEACHING

Langendorf was shocked when it was announced that she had won Teacher of the Month.

"It was a bit of a surprise — especially this year," she said, referring to COVID-19.

Responding to the pandemic, Langendorf found new ways to provide instruction. On Feb. 12, for example, her students used bags of cookies with letters on them to spell words while separating the vowels and the consonants.

“They got to eat their cookies,” Langendorf said.

Aside from iPads and smartboards, her students have also used hands-on items, like dice to count, as a way of making instruction feel more like normal.

“It’s been a very different experience,” Langendorf said. “We’ve all learned from this.”

Challenges to the school year aside, the long-time educator said first grade is her “all-time favorite” to teach.

“They make tremendous gains,” Langendorf said. “By the end of first grade, they’re … excited about what they’re doing and learning.”

Del Norte’s principal, Richard Ferguson, complimented Langendorf in an email to the newspaper.

“Ms. Langendorf is an outstanding teacher who has a solid reputation of excellence in our community. It is a wonderful thing to have a staff member recognized for hard work and dedication,” he wrote. “I wholeheartedly agree with the nomination as Ms. Langendorf is deserving of this award.”

BECOMING AN EDUCATOR

Langendorf was born in Silver City, N. M., and moved to Arizona before returning home.

Education ran in the family, but even in childhood, Langendorf had no idea she wanted to teach.

“I watched my mother for many years; she put in a lot of extra hours,” Langendorf said. “At first, I didn’t want to do that and I didn’t understand why she did it, because I got to see the after-hours part.”

As she grew older, she started helping out her mother and step-father — who was a school counselor — with work and she began to change her mind.

Langendorf graduated from Eastern New Mexico University with a degree in elementary education with an endorsement in early childhood studies — but dabbled in sports training and adaptive physical education.

“Which then led to [me saying], ‘Wow! There are a lot of students that are struggling and dropping out of school,’” Langendorf said. “I really wanted to make a difference and inspire students to continue learning and be excited.”

She applied to teach at several different schools, including the former Washington Elementary School in Gallup.

“The staff that were at the school at that point were all very friendly and down to earth,” Langendorf wrote in an email. “I learned that Gallup was a melting pot of many different cultures.”

ONCE A TEACHER, ALWAYS A TEACHER

Like many educators, Langendorf thought about getting a master's degree to become a principal. But her teaching instincts always called her back.

"I really love being in the classroom with students," she said.

Langendorf believes an educator's ability to tap into students' interests while they are at a young age is key to their success in the long-term.

"If we catch students young, then maybe that will carry on for the rest of their education," she said. "You see that little light bulb click on and they're like, 'Whoo! I got it!' That is one of the best things ever."

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. Second St. in Gallup.

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