

Lucy Montoya named Camille's Sidewalk Café 'Teacher of the Month'

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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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.

This month Lucy Montoya, who works at Indian Hills Elementary as a first-grade teacher, is the recipient of February's "Teacher of the Month" award.

Montoya grew up going to school in Gallup. In an interview with the *Sun*, she said she spent her summers playing school with her sister, but that wasn't what led her to teaching.

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After high school, she was a preschool assistant at Gallup Catholic School. That decision ultimately led her to get her degree in education from the Gallup branch of the University of New Mexico.

"I got to see some of the most amazing educators teach children," Montoya said. "That drove me to say I want to do this."

Once she got her degree – which she worked on while raising two daughters – she started teaching at the Gallup-McKinley County School District.

Montoya said her favorite part about teaching is watching her students grow to love learning.

"Teachers will tell you [about] that moment when the kids get something, they understand it and their eyes are just big and bright," Montoya explained. "That is always the coolest thing [I've] ever seen. I think [my favorite thing about] teaching is working side by side with the students and just really helping them."

Like many teachers, the pandemic proved to be a challenge for Montoya.

"There's been a lot of obstacles, things that we've never experienced as educators," Montoya said. "Last year having to teach remotely, that was super tough. I wasn't really good with technology and I really had to step up my game to learn and to be innovating to be able to teach online."

Marie Diaz teaches first and second grade with Montoya as her co-teacher. Diaz said that Montoya handled online teaching well, noting that she even threw a winter party on Zoom so that the students could perform for their parents.

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Montoya credits the parents, saying they really helped her when the students were doing remote learning.

"I was in awe of what the parents did," Montoya said. "The parents just stepped up and I was honored to be their child's teacher because I saw that happen. They stood with me and we created a memorable relationship that will always be etched in my heart."

Diaz said Montoya always makes sure she has a great relationship with her students' parents. She calls them and always makes sure they're involved in their child's education.

Another teacher at Indian Hills also noticed Montoya's dedication to her students.

"She is just a teacher that goes above and beyond all the time," Melanie Van Drop, a third-grade teacher, said. "I think she really stands out because she just does so much for her students and her families."

Van Drop also noted that Montoya is a great asset to her school.

"She's really the glue that holds our school together," Van Drop explained. "If there's an emergency, she's our go-to person."

Montoya has been the head teacher at Indian Hills for nine years now. As the head teacher she gives direction to the staff when the principal is gone and she provides support for them as well. She also handles emergency and safety procedures.

Jimi De La Riva, a preschool teacher at Indian Hills, also spoke on Montoya's ability to bring people together.

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"I appreciate her because she really works on creating a sense of community and belonging not only in her classroom but in the school and with her coworkers."

When Montoya received the award, she was overcome with emotion. She said she chose to keep her mask on for the pictures because she knew she would cry.

"I was so honored," she said about receiving the award.

When asked what the hardest part about teaching is, Montoya said it's the feeling that you're not doing enough as a teacher.

"The hardest part about teaching is you want to give them everything," Montoya said through her tears. "You want them to be able to learn everything they can so the hardest part is a student is struggling and I really want to help them...."

To nominate a local educator for Teacher of the Month, fill out a nomination form at Camille's Sidewalk Café at 306 S. Second St. in Gallup.

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Sun Correspondent