

Teacher of the Month: Special Ed Teacher Vivian Franco

Written by By Babette Herrmann Sun Editor
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As Vivian Franco speaks to her class with a radiant smile, it's clear that she loves her job of teaching. Her voice echoes her enthusiasm for teaching, which likely earned her the title of Camille's Sidewalk Café Teacher of the Month.

Folks that stroll into the café can nominate someone who has inspired them. What's tough is picking a winner out of numerous winners.

As Franco speaks to her students, what's not immediately obvious, or at least during this visit, that her classroom, smaller than a traditional class of around 30 students, is a special education class.

"It's basically a Level D class, lower functioning students with disabilities," she said, adding that each student is an individual and her aim is to instill confidence through education.

Franco's teaching journey began nearly 30 years ago in Baguio City, Philippines, and most recently, this year, she started working at Gallup High. The new position enables her to engage in the "Gateway to Independence" program.

Under the Gateway program, she aids special needs students post-graduation, ages 18-21, in mapping out their route toward a job, college or path that best suits them moving forward in their lives.

Prior to working at Gallup High, she taught at Miyamura High School for about a decade, and

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reflects on her career there with reverence and appreciation. After all, it was her first job in the states.

When she arrived at Miyamura High School in 2005, she was pleased with the private classrooms and the support of other teachers and staff, adding that, “it’s not easy coming to the United States.”

Franco noted that while teaching in the Philippines, there was an open area where multiple classes were taught together. She said that it created strong bonds between the teachers. The drawback – it was sometimes distracting.

Looking back, while attending college in the Philippines, it wasn’t her first plan to head to the states. After high school, she attended college, but along the way she got married and started a family.

“Before I graduated from college, I had two children,” she said.

Franco’s first semester of college was in the Philippines capital of Manila, but she longed for home and returned mid-year to attend Baguio University. Her mom encouraged her to study engineering, “but I didn’t see myself becoming an engineer,” she said.

She went on to earn her Bachelor’s of Science degree, majoring in the Philippine language, and started teaching at her former high school, recruited by the same principal from when she was a student there.

If that wasn’t enough, she went on to study and earn Master’s Degrees in education management, special education, and post-secondary education.

Creating an impressive resume, Franco longed to teach abroad, with her first choice being the states. During her search, it didn’t take long to get a response, and an offer to teach for

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Gallup-McKinley County Schools via a teacher placement agency.

So, what caused her to gravitate toward special education? It was a special calling, she said, a desire to help students that face more hurdles in life than your average student.

“It’s a special calling, and my passion,” she said. “They can feel that you care for them.

“You need to have a big heart.”

Without the big heart and passion, Franco says, a teacher won’t last in special education or even regular teaching. She’s seen her fair share of the revolving door, where teachers stay a year or two, then head elsewhere.

Perhaps they burn out or they are chasing a bigger paycheck in a bigger city, she pondered.

However, at this juncture, she’s not concerned with the bigger city as she has found her home and purpose in Gallup. Plus, two out of three her children are nearby.

“We’re a family of educators,” she said, noting that her husband and all three of her children teach. Her son is the only one that seems a world away – he’s a teacher in the Philippines.

As a seasoned educator, Franco noted that learning isn’t just for the students, it’s for the teachers as well. By staying humble, she said, she’s learned from other staff on how to continually improve as a teacher.

And she shares her wisdom with those considering a teaching career.

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“Stay open to learning and helping,” she said. “Work as a team with your assistant teacher. When you help each other, you contribute what you know.”

Franco also keeps it fresh by asking herself this question from time to time: “What more can I offer to these young people to help them become successful in life?”

It’s an answer that Franco holds the key to, and the catalyst to her success as an educator.

To nominate an instructor that you admire and respect as Camille’s Teacher of the Month, head to Camille’s Sidewalk Cafe, 306 S. Second St. in Gallup.

By Babette Herrmann

Sun Editor