



Santa Barbara County Education Office

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Bill Cirone op ed column

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Michelle Minetti-Smith in the spotlight

By Bill Cirone, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools

In our drive to showcase outstanding teachers throughout Santa Barbara County, we are eager to shine another spotlight on the 2017 Santa Barbara County Teacher of the Year, Michelle Minetti-Smith, a local hero in every sense of the word.

Michelle is a first grade, developmental bilingual teacher at Mary Buren Elementary School in the Guadalupe Union School District and there is no doubt that her humble nature, vast skills, and utter calmness, are hallmarks that inspire all who know her.

Those who have seen her classroom in the heart of Guadalupe are always impressed. Recent visitors would have seen student-crafted Johnny Appleseed pictures on the walls, groups of children working on different aspects of reading and writing, the flow of academic language in Spanish in the morning, and the switch to English in the afternoon, plus her ability to answer questions of little ones and visiting adults, in rapid fire, all while keeping her calm and her cool. What makes her achievement all the more wonderful is that Michelle is homegrown, with deep roots in Guadalupe and the Santa Maria Valley. She was the fourth generation of her family to go to school at Mary Buren, where she now teaches. Her grandmother was a teacher as well.

Amazingly, Michelle's fourth grade teacher, Mary Buren, is the school's namesake. Jose Nichols was the principal when she attended the school, and he hired her back to teach there 20 years ago.

Michelle could have gone into the thriving family business but decided early on to focus instead on children and teaching. Now she has brought that goal to the highest level of achievement. She greets every child who arrives in her classroom and has high expectations for all. She also mentors new teachers. She is

the perfect example of what's best about teaching and represents so well the outstanding teachers from every corner of our bountiful county.

It is widely known that the caliber of teachers in Santa Barbara County is among the best in California and America. That means that the selection process for the Santa Barbara County Teacher of the Year is both challenging and rigorous. All 20 school districts in Santa Barbara County are invited to nominate one of their own to be considered for the honor. The nominees reflect deeply about their teaching practice, and then demonstrate their outstanding skills for members of a broad-based committee, who interview and observe each nominee before making a final selection.

Celebrating teaching means recognizing how teachers provide opportunities for students to grow. The teaching craft is about sparking creativity, confidence, and innovation. It's about enabling students to envision themselves as scientists, inventors, artists, learners, and citizens of the world beyond the 21st Century. It's about instilling a sense of hope and then providing the skills to help those goals take wing.

As is the case with so many of our teachers, Michelle Minetti-Smith does all these things, every day. She makes us all proud.

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