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The Complete Package

Orinda Union School District's 2014-15 Teacher of the Year

By Diane Claytor



Del Rey Elementary School teacher Tricia Newhart works with some of her first grade students. Photo provided

Long after the bell has rung and the 20 first graders in Tricia Newhart's class have left for the weekend, the room still radiates energy. Colorful drawings are strung across the room, the walls hold more drawings, three-dimensional bridges constructed from K'Nex, writings and math work; remnants of an art project litter the floor and books tumble off the crowded shelves. Sitting here in what is probably the first quiet moment of the day, one senses that these Del Rey Elementary School students are not only well taught, but well loved.

Newhart, a Lafayette resident, was one of four teachers from the Lamorinda area nominated to represent their districts in the 2014-15 Contra Costa County Teacher of the Year competition. She has been teaching in Orinda for 24 years, the last four of which have been at Del Rey. Listening to her speak, you know that she is definitely doing what she was meant to do. "Teaching fulfills me," she said. "It feeds my soul. Just as an artist paints because that's what she needs to do, teaching is what makes me complete."

It was Newhart's fourth grade teacher who inspired her to follow the same path. "She believed in me," Newhart noted, "seeing the potential in a not so confident little girl. I will always remember her warmth and the high expectations she had for her stu-

dents. I strive to be a positive influence in students' lives just as she was in mine."

Born in Portugal, Newhart's father was in the military and the family moved around a lot. She found her way to California where she attended both UC Davis and UC Santa Barbara, earning her master's degree in speech and hearing. In the 24 years she's been in Orinda, Newhart has taught first, 1-2 splits and fourth grades as well as served as a district literacy coach, working with K-2 teachers. But she missed the classroom. "The kids are what give me my sense of joy," she said, so she returned to her first love.

Kirsten Theurer, Del Rey's principal, said it's obvious that Newhart simply loves teaching and "brings a passion ... that is contagious. When you walk into her first grade classroom the energy is palpable."

Newhart focuses on teaching kids to be internally motivated and develop a sense of wonderment and curiosity as well as an attitude of gratitude. "One of the reasons we're here," she explained, "is to make a difference. I share this with my students by teaching them to respect themselves as well as others, to take pride in their work and to always give their best effort. I want them to know that they have the power to make positive changes in the world."

Newhart, who is soft-spoken and

laughs easily, said that "teaching is food for the soul and the intellect. It provides one person the opportunity to touch many lives at an age when values and beliefs are being developed. Being in the classroom is a daily reminder to wonder, to laugh and to cultivate gratitude. I love going to work every day."

Contra Costa County began recognizing outstanding teachers in 1972, establishing the Teachers of the Year program, which is directed by the Contra Costa County Office of Education. It is open to all K-12 teachers in public and private schools. The selection process involves both in-person observations of the nominees by a committee of education specialists followed by a personal interview with each of the district's Teacher of the Year representatives.

Lamorinda Weekly hopes to feature Moraga School District Teacher of the Year representative Ann Ralph of Donald Rheem Elementary School and Lafayette School District representative Olivia Vann of Springhill Elementary School in upcoming issues. The Acalanes Union High School District Educator of the Year, Jane Kelson, was featured in the March 12 issue. To view the story, go to http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/arc_hive/issue0801/Campo-Science-Teacher-Named-AUHSD-Educator-of-the-Year.html.

2014 California Distinguished Schools Announced

Five Lamorinda elementary schools named

Submitted by Jonathan Lance

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson recently named 24 Contra Costa County elementary schools as California Distinguished Schools for 2014, "for their strong commitment and innovative approaches to improving student academic achievement." The following Lamorinda elementary schools were included in the list: Del Rey, Glorietta, Lafayette, Sleepy Hollow, and Wagner Ranch. "I applaud these strong, thriving schools that are making such impressive strides in preparing their students for continued success," Torlakson adds. "This award is well-deserved by these school communities for their enduring dedication to high standards,

hard work, and unwavering support."

The program recognizes elementary and secondary schools in alternating years. Distinguished Schools must meet a variety of eligibility criteria, including designated federal and state accountability measures, and they must provide an in-depth description of two Signature Practices that their staff members believe have contributed to the success of their students. Following the acceptance of their application, each school receives a site visit by a team of local educators to validate the full implementation of the Signature Practices described in the application.

In Contra Costa County, those school visits were conducted in

March and early April by a team of 19 educators from the Contra Costa County Office of Education, augmented by 18 school district administrators, and four retired district administrators. The County Distinguished Schools program is coordinated by Peggy Marshburn, chief communications officer, Contra Costa County Office of Education.

Distinguished Schools are honored at regional award ceremonies, where the state superintendent of California Public Instruction presents each school with a 2014 Distinguished School plaque and flag. The events and awards are funded by donations from many California corporations and statewide-educational organizations.

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