

Overwhelming Generosity for Retiring Springhill Custodian

By Cathy Tyson



Retiring custodian from Springhill Elementary School, Quan Nguyen, was crowned King for a Day. Photo C. Tyson

After a quarter century of setting up for meetings, helping with hot lunches, keeping the campus clean and dealing with many student messes, custodian Quan Nguyen is retiring.

Although he usually works behind the scenes, Springhill Elementary School Principal Patrick Gargiulo named Nguyen “King for the Day,” and music teacher Vicki Ghulam led students at a recent Spirit Day celebration in a cheerful custom-made song highlighting all that he does for Springhill, with the students chiming in on the chorus: “It’s Quan!”

He leaves behind a huge fan club of current and former students as well as their parents, along with the teachers and staff at the Lafayette school.

Wanting to express their sincere thanks for his hard work over the years, parent Kristen Altbam started a GoFundMe campaign on the Internet with an original goal of raising \$2,500 as a retirement gift. But, ultimately, that goal was surpassed, with over 190 individuals and families contributing a total of \$10,550.

Recognizing Nguyen as a “dear man who will always have a place in our hearts,” Altbam presented the retiring custodian with the check. They also gave Nguyen a book containing all

of the heartfelt messages posted on the funding website by grateful donors.

“We’re here to honor a very special person,” said Springhill Parent Faculty Club President Sara Carter at the assembly. “He’s like a movie star, probably the most popular guy on campus.” Some of the students came to the microphone to explain how Nguyen exemplifies character: always doing what he can to help, with hard work and dedication, and always with a smile on his face.

In addition to the large check, a rose bush that was rescued by the custodian when the school was remodeled years ago now has a prominent place on campus, and will be known as Nguyen’s garden with a plaque to honor him. “Even though he’ll be gone, his spirit will live on,” said Carter.

Nguyen escaped from Vietnam with his pregnant wife in the middle of the night, according to the GoFundMe site. The young couple eventually arrived in America. He worked hard, and put his two children through college.

After the ceremony, he said he has never received a check so large in his life, and he may use some of the money to go back to Vietnam to visit family.

Award-Winning Illustrator Rafael López Shares Art From His Heart

By A. K. Carroll



Image provided

“I grew up in Mexico City, and there was this huge flea market. My dad would take me every Sunday and he would walk away with 15-20 new books,” award-winning artist and illustrator Rafael López says of his early encounters with literature. “He was a lover of books, especially old books. As a child we had this wall in our living room packed with old books. I’d read about everything.” In a time when there was no Internet for personal distraction, López immersed himself in pages, especially in art books. “I loved seeing images.”

López’s love for imagery, nurtured by his architect parents, dominated his formative years—from those spent studying under Felipe Ehrenberg in Exeter, England, to those invested in earning a BFA in illustration in Los Angeles. Twelve years out of college, López made a shift toward conceptual illustration, introducing Latin elements into his work.

“I wanted to become a little more personal and a little less annual reportish,” López says. That personal touch is what got him noticed by Theresa Howe and launched his career as an award-winning children’s book illustrator. López’s work as an illustrator, along with his heart for community-building, is what brings him to Lafayette Public Library on Friday, June 19, as a part of this summer’s reading program, Read to the Rhythm.

“He’s going to bring original artwork, do a drawing demonstration, and bring slides showing various parts of the work,” says youth services librarian Ginny Golden, who describes López’s illustrations as “bright and beautiful.”

Golden discovered López through his recent work on “Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl’s Courage Changed Music,” a picture-book based on a true story about a young girl in Cuba who wants to play the drums despite gender stereotypes that forbid her from doing so. The book has been selected as a featured read for the Read to the Rhythm program.

“This is a program we do every summer to encourage children and the whole family to continue learning,” says Golden. “We really want summer to be a time when they read for their own enjoyment. It’s important for the county and really the whole country.”

In an effort to promote the program and draw in readers, the library has put together a wide variety of activities, including an event with Drum Dream Girl author Margarita Engle in August, and the upcoming evening with Rafael López.

López’s presentation is slated to begin at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Hall of the Lafayette library, with the Azucar Quartet playing Latin jazz and salsa starting at 5:30 p.m.

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