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Del Rey custodian sweeps up accolades at his own retirement party

By Cathy Dausman



"Mr. Steve" surrounded by admirers at May 24 off-site party. Photo Cathy Dausman

chaperoned several field trips himself and built a custom catwalk for Cheryl Collins' sewing class fashion show.

After 40 years of set up and clean up, it will soon be time to lock up for the very last time. "Mr. Steve" retires June 30; it is likely Del Rey will feel his loss for years.

Orinda Union School District honored Eydam with a standing ovation in August when he was named their Classified Employee of the Year, but his school admirers have another name: they call him Emperor of Del Rey. "The kids think he's [the] principal," joked Kirsten Theurer, who also claims the title. "I can't say enough about him."

"He's like a celebrity," said former student Evan Barrie-Kivel, who with friend Brendan McFeely now tower above the man McFeely calls "the nicest guy I know." Even neighborhood dogs knew to beat a path to the custodian's door for attention and affection. The accolades continue to pile up on a "Mr. Steve Del Rey" website.

Mr. Steve fans had a chance to say goodbye at Eydam's retirement party May 24 at Orinda Intermediate School. The party had to be held off site, Fuller explained, otherwise Mr. Steve would have set up and cleaned up himself. It was a pasta and pinball-themed party (Mr. Steve likes both) with a "dress like Mr. Steve" option. Even OUSD Superintendent Dr. Carolyn Seaton sported Eydam's trademark cargo shorts and district shirt.

"This is quite the overwhelming event," Eydam admitted. "The Del Rey community has been such a special part of my life for the past 38 years," he said. "I'm looking forward to coming back to Del Rey from time to time to attend school events and student performances," he promised. But Eydam admits he won't miss the sound of his 5 a.m. alarm clock or the extended length of his commute, which has tripled from its original half hour drive. His summer plans include visits to California landmarks and theme parks. A generous privately sourced goodbye check presented to Eydam raised enough to insure he can even take an all-expense paid first-time vacation to Disney World. Eydam often worked 12-hour days to insure after-hours and weekend events at Del Rey ran smoothly. "I don't know when he goes home," Fuller said.

Alas, the answer to that question comes from Eydam himself: "June 30."

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