

SANTA CLARITA STAR

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WINTER 2007

SANTA CLARITA VALLEY TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Saugus Teacher Takes State Honor

DAWNA COUNTRYMAN NAMED ONE OF FIVE TOP CALIFORNIA INSTRUCTORS

Dawna Countryman, a fifth-grade teacher at Tesoro del Valle Elementary School, was selected by the California Department of Education as one of five remarkable educators in the California Teachers of the Year program for 2007.

Countryman, who began teaching in 1988, is a graduate of UCLA and is working on her doctorate in the educational

leadership program at UCLA.

The process of selecting a Teacher of the Year is rigorous. Once Countryman was nominated, she was visited by a state selection committee that evaluated her teaching methods, classroom environment and presentation skills, and observed her rapport with her students.

In a press release, State
See **COUNTRYMAN**, page 2

"I am very excited and humbled. There are so many great teachers who work so hard every day, doing amazing and incredible things in their classrooms. Being chosen is an honor. I learn from everyone."

— Dawna Countryman

Uniserv Receives Top Communication Awards

The Santa Clarita Valley Teachers Association received special recognition at the annual California Teachers Association Communication Awards dinner, held at the Century Plaza Hotel on January 18.

Top prizes were given to the SCVTA for the 30-second commercial produced by Gary Choppé, which highlighted several teachers in the valley. The spot was shown at local Edwards Theaters during the months of August, September and October. Many students were surprised to see their teachers on the big screen.

The commercial won in two categories: "Communications to Parents or Community" and "Special Membership Communications." Laura Terman, executive director of Uniserv, said she was very pleased with the commercial and received positive feedback from the community and the teachers. "We



Gary Choppé accepts an award from Bay Valley Chairman Ken Neimeyer in recognition of a commercial Choppé produced for teachers.

were thrilled to hear about the first-place award," she said. "We are looking forward to doing

more positive stories and articles about the great teachers we have in this valley."

DISTRICT ROUNDUPS

Hart

The fall semester of 2006-07 was a sobering time for HDTA. Our chief negotiator and good friend, Kurt Chesebrough, died after a brief illness. His passing has been deeply felt. We are fortunate to have retired teacher and negotiator Jim Seely back on board in an emeritus position to assist us with the 2006-07 bargaining process.

The Hart District continues to make good use of the NEA MegaSkills program, which brings parents and teachers together to collaborate on strategies for improved student learning. In this spring semester, a MegaSkills program is being presented at Sierra Vista Junior High School, focusing on middle-school students and issues. HDTA hopes this program will be a useful resource for those working to make the Sierra Vista parent center a success.

Hart District and HDTA reps are also continuing their working group discussions in an attempt to develop a Hart District alternative salary/professional development "pilot" program. John Britz, a CTA bargaining specialist, has been acting as our facilitator as we try to hammer out a pilot program for possible implementation in 2007-08. Our goal is to expand opportunities for teachers to excel and be recognized, and for students to improve in their learning.

Good news was also reached for our members a little earlier this year in regards to next year's calendar. Our 2007-08 calendar maintains our mid-August start date, the three-week winter break and the early out in June! This seems to be a formula that agrees well with our staff, especially because it ends the first semester with the start of the winter break.

Castaic

The Castaic Teachers Association is very proud of one of our own, John DeLemos. Not only was he honored as the Castaic Union School District Teacher of the Year, he was also named Los Angeles County Teacher of the Year. He will be honored on February 10 by the Castaic Chamber of Commerce. Congratulations, John!

On another note, our district is in talks with The

Newhall Land and Farming Co., about a possible new elementary school off Highway 126. That is exciting news for our district. There has also been some recent news about our eighth-graders and where they will be attending high school next year. Both the district and the association will do what they can to support the students and keep them at the high school they are currently attending.

The majority of our BTSA Support Providers have ended two days of training on coaching skills called Mentoring Matters. The training comes highly recommended from our PAR Consultant Lee Wolfe.

Newhall

Happy New Year from Newhall. We are starting out the year with our contract settled. Congratulations go out to both negotiating teams for working together to come to an equitable and fair agreement. Construction is still going on as we finish up our two schools, Peachland and Newhall. We are looking forward to nine of our schools operating on the same calendar next year. Congratulations and best wishes to Nancy Copley in her new position as instructional assistant. I am sure she will be a welcome addition to the district office. May this year be one of enlightenment, inspiration, and opening doors for children to reach their dreams.

Saugus

This has been a good year for STA. The association's goal was realized by reaching a salary agreement early in the year. Hopefully, it will create a precedent for future years. The 4% increase was reflected in December paychecks. The additional 1% increase, compounded with the previous 4%, was reflected in the January paychecks. Retro checks were delivered to teachers in January.

This year's settlement also included a second opportunity to move over a column each year, and the direct donation of sick days. Teachers recently approved the 2007-08 calendar — pending final approval of the Saugus Union School District Board — as well as a \$100,000 life-insurance policy.

Teachers were pleased to learn of the change in requirements for renewing California teaching

credentials. The recent signing of SB 1209 (effective January 1, 2007) eliminates the professional growth and professional service requirement needed to renew a Professional Clear Multiple or Single Subject Credential. All renewals must be submitted online, and you must use a credit card to pay a fee of \$55. The shift is a result of SB 1209 (Scott, Chapter 517, Statutes of 2006), an omnibus education bill aimed at ensuring equitable access for all students to fully prepared teachers, and streamlining the credentialing process.

Sulphur Springs

Two teachers from The Sulphur Springs District were recently honored from outside of the district. Paulette Carson, now Paulette Volmer, has been appointed to serve as a member of the Instructional Materials Advisory Panel to evaluate instructional materials for the 2007 Mathematics Primary Adoption. Paulette was a trainer for LACOE throughout Southern California this past summer.

On January 23, Kim Tredick was selected as one of the best educators in the nation. Kim was chosen for the Milken National Educator Award, which included a check for \$25,000! The Milken Family Foundation personally selects no more than 100 exceptional educators nationally for this annual award. Congratulations to both Paulette and Kim!

On another note, SSDTA and the district agreed upon contract language — a 4% salary increase with 2% retro to July, and a continuation of no out-of-pocket expenses for Family HMO health benefits.

The teachers of the Sulphur Springs District have been busy continuing to implement the new standards-based report card, planning celebrations for winners of the Association-sponsored Creative Writing Contest, as well as Read Across America in honor of Dr. Suess' birthday.

Ten Teachers will be attending The Good Teaching Conference in Irvine in March, while others anxiously await their return to learn about the new ideas and strategies presented at the conference.

Countryman

FROM PAGE 1

Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell said California continues to face a

critical teacher shortage, and the California Teachers of the Year program plays a pivotal role in recruiting new teachers.

The California Teachers of the Year program began in 1972 as a

way to honor educators, address the challenges they face and promote collaboration between teachers to meet those challenges.

Congratulations to Dawna and the Saugus Union School District.

Teachers Get Lowdown on Retirement

WORKSHOP HELPS INSTRUCTORS STRATEGIZE FOR LIFE AFTER EMPLOYMENT

By Joan Oxman

More than 75 teachers attended the December CalSTRS workshop, sponsored by CTA and the Santa Clarita Valley Teachers Association. Teachers grasped their CalSTRS Handbook as they listened attentively to the CalSTRS representative from the Los Angeles County Office of Education, eager to learn everything about retirement and disability benefits, the Defined Benefit Program and the Supplement Program.

Retirement must be planned many years in advance, and decisions made today can greatly impact the ability to retire comfortably. If you choose to elect

an option beneficiary, the earlier you elect one, the greater your benefits. This election can only be made after reaching retirement age and while still employed. Effective December 31, 2006, option beneficiary elections one through five will be discontinued, and options six through eight will be renamed. CalSTRS uses a formula to determine retirement benefits, which can be calculated at the CalSTRS Web site.

Teachers should examine their CalSTRS Annual Statement carefully to make sure that they have been credited for their service, which can be no greater than 1.0 years. Teachers should contact their districts immediately if any errors are found. Teachers who are 10 years or less from retirement are encouraged to contact the CalSTRS Regional Office at (562) 922-6838 to set up an interview appointment in preparation for retirement.

To obtain detailed information go to the following Web site and request the free 2006-07 Member Handbook:
http://www.calstrs.com/Help/forms_publications/pubs.aspx
 For access to your STRS account, current statement, and more go to:
<http://www.calstrs.com>



(From left) Patty Fitzpatrick, Orval Garrison, Joan Oxman, Nancy Butler and Krysti Wilson

Santa Clarita Valley Teachers Association

- Krysti WilsonCastaic
- Orval GarrisonHart
- Nancy ButlerNewhall
- Linda MetzgerNewhall ESP
- Richard SealNewhall ESP
- Joan OxmanSaugus
- Patty FitzpatrickSulphur Springs

Laura Terman, Executive Director; Roberta "Bobbi" Osborn, Office Assistant; Patti Rasmussen, Star Editor; Jared Evans, Star Copy Editor, Designer

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