

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

October 2, 2007

Media Alert

Contact: Robert Herman
Public Information Officer
(559) 733-6606 – office
(559) 303-8568 – cell

Tulare County Office of Education Announces:

***Excellence in Education* Winners Honored Tomorrow, October 3, at Breakfast Event**

Winners, Finalists and Nominees to be Honored at Visalia Convention Center • 7:30 – 9:00 a.m.

Visalia - The *Excellence in Education Awards* program, now celebrating its 13th year, will honor the winners, finalists and nominees in the three categories: Tulare County Administrator/Manager of the Year, Teacher of the Year and School Employee of the Year, Wednesday morning, October 3, at the Visalia Convention Center. Approximately 400 friends, family members and colleagues are expected to attend the invitation-only event, which begins at 7:30 a.m. in the ballroom. This year, a total of 36 nominees from Tulare County schools districts participated in competition, which was judged in May. Winners were also announced in May 2007.

"The winners this year share a visionary spirit," says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. "Each one has an extraordinary ability to recognize the challenges their students face and to create pioneering programs to meet them. They also possess remarkable abilities to raise achievement through meaningful connections with each student."

- more -

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

Page 2

The winners in the 2007 *Excellence in Education* Awards Program are:

Administrator of the Year

Katherine Johnson, Principal of West Putnam Elementary in Porterville, was selected as the 2007 Administrator/Manager of the Year. Mrs. Johnson exemplifies the concept of moving students toward academic excellence, which is evident by the significant increase in the test scores at her school. Her philosophy for herself and her entire staff revolves around the question, “How can we best help children?” Every aspect of a student’s life is important to her. She was instrumental in organizing the on-campus West Putnam Pantry that is open to students and their families, *free of charge*, to receive donated clothing, food, furniture, toiletries and anything else they need to make their lives easier. Katherine is highly respected by her peers and recognized as the kind of leader that promotes learning for all by giving unlimited support.

Teacher of the Year

Rick Pence, who is a First Grade Structured English Immersion (SEI) teacher, at Roosevelt Elementary School in Tulare, is the 2007 Tulare County Teacher of the Year. Mr. Pence has been involved in education for the past 33 years. During this time, he has developed his own unique style of instruction. In his teaching philosophy, Rick says that he is hopeful that he has touched young lives in a positive way to enable them to become success stories. Rick took on the challenge of assisting the district create the model to form other SEI classrooms. He did an excellent job and is now a mentor to SEI teachers throughout the district. His program design is making a significant difference for English language learners in most schools in the district. He

- more -

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

Page 3

was also described as one with the unique ability to connect with kids and this ability endears him to parents, staff, and administrators. In addition to the many contributions he has made during his tenure with the Tulare City School District, he is involved in many professional organizations and his community.

School Employee of the Year

Maria Hinojosa, an instructional aide and campus assistant at Woodlake Valley Middle School, is the 2007 School Employee of the Year. Mrs. Hinojosa's principal describes her as a positive role model and a big influence in many areas at the school. Maria has shown tireless energy in her position for over the past 6 years. She feels it is a privilege to play a part in the lives of sixth graders during this transitional pre-teen period. Maria strives to make a difference in the lives of those she touches, both educationally and morally. Her work at Woodlake Valley Middle School was described as more of a ministry than a job. She has a knack of making some of the neediest students feel valued, important, and included. In addition to her commitment to the school and children of Woodlake, she is involved with her church and other community organizations.

2007 Finalists

Teacher of the Year

Loretta Hicks, Exeter Elementary

Melissa Morales, Earlimart Elementary

- more -

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

Page 4

Administrator/Manager of the Year

Marty Frolli, Visalia Unified

Antonio Rodriguez, Tulare Joint Union High School

School Employee of the Year

Linda Lemus, Tulare Joint Union High School

Kristopher Saavedra, Exeter Elementary

Summary

“We appreciate the support of our partners in this event – the Educational Employees Credit Union, its President/CEO Bruce Barnett, and board of directors,” says Jim Vidak. “Together, we have the privilege of recognizing the many dedicated and talented men and women who devote their lives to educating children and young adults in Tulare County.”

For more information, contact Robert Herman, Public Information Officer, at (559) 733-6606.

TCOE

Rel. 44/07