

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools*

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## **For Immediate Release**

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**Tulare County Office of Education Announces:**

## **Countywide *Excellence in Education* Winners Announced**

**Teacher of the Year, School Employee of the Year and Administrator/Manager of the Year Named**

A selection committee of 20 Tulare County business and educational leaders met April 17 to review the Tulare County Administrator/Manager of the Year, Teacher of the Year and School Employee of the Year nominations for 2012. The *Excellence in Education Awards* program, now celebrating its 18<sup>th</sup> year, honors “the best of the best” in the three educational categories. A total of 37 nominations were received this year from Tulare County school districts, the College of the Sequoias and Porterville College. Each nomination was reviewed and scored individually by every member of the selection committee.

“The winners are people who are committed to excellence in their respective areas of education,” says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. “Each winner also has a deep commitment to the well-being of their communities and to helping students see their roles as productive citizens. Tulare County is blessed with so many great teachers, school employees and administrators. It’s an honor to recognize them through this program.”

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Once the selection committee reviewed each nomination and the scores were tallied, County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak visited each of the winners to inform them of their award.

The winners in the 2012 *Excellence in Education* program are:

## *Administrator of the Year*

### **Brian Hollingshead, Principal, Mission Valley Elementary School, Tulare City School District**

Brian Hollingshead has worked as an administrator for the Tulare City School District for the past 22 years. The schools he has led have shown consistent, positive academic growth. For instance, when he left Garden Elementary to open Mission Valley Elementary in 2007, the school had the district's highest Academic Performance Index (API) score at 822. Under his leadership, Mission Valley Elementary has achieved a score of 855, which is now the district's highest score. His nominator stated that Mr. Hollingshead is a "master at finding and utilizing each staff member's strength." This, in turn, provides him with experts in several areas to assist in leading the professional development of others.

He has been a long-time proponent of the CHARACTER COUNTS! program, having been trained at the Josephson Institute (creators of program) in 1997. While the principal at Live Oak Middle School in Tulare, the school twice received the prestigious Bonner Center for Character Education Award from Fresno State University. At Mission Valley the program is "the base for everything we do," he says.

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Mr. Hollingshead's nominators praised him for knowing every student and parent by name and taking an interest in their family activities and needs. He puts his compassion for Mission Valley families in action by helping to coordinate many community service activities at school, including Thanksgiving food drives, Christmas food and toy drives and the Max Choboian Run to benefit the Tulare Youth Service Bureau. For his support of the American Heart Association, Mission Valley was named the organization's "School of the Year" in 2009. The school's service work not only benefits the community, but helps students develop into caring, young citizens.

## *Teacher of the Year*

### **James Kusserow, Band Teacher, Porterville High School, Porterville Unified School District**

As director of the Porterville High School band programs for the past 22 years, James Kusserow has helped hundreds of students develop their confidence, self-discipline and sense of community service. Nominators commended Mr. Kusserow for welcoming all students willing to support the tradition of the band – from well-honed musicians to eager beginners and students with special needs. One of Mr. Kusserow's students said, "It seems that all of my life lessons are in band!"

Jim Kusserow's teaching philosophy is centered on the concepts of fairness, consistency, positive reinforcement, leading by example, setting high expectations, and having fun. He says, "I found out through experience that students performed at a much higher level when I rewarded the traits and characteristics that demonstrated good musicianship and discipline. In other words, if I praised what was right, the wrong behaviors soon disappeared." The reputation of his bands' fine

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musicianship has opened doors for performances at the White House, Lincoln Center in New York City, Carnegie Hall in New York City, the Rose Bowl, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington, Virginia, and many other significant locations and events.

Jim Kusserow has received numerous honors. He currently serves as the president of the California Music Educators Association (Central Section). He was inducted into the National High School Band Hall of Fame in 1990, and in 2010, was named a Legion of Honor Laureate by the John Philip Sousa Foundation.

## *School Employee of the Year*

### **Cherí Barnes, Lead Personnel Technician, Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE)**

As lead personnel technician for the Tulare County Office of Education's Human Resources Division, Cherí Barnes provides TCOE administrators the support they need for hiring, negotiations, policies and procedures, and leaves of absence. Privately, Ms. Barnes leads a non-profit organization dedicated to providing community education and support to victims of brain injury.

Ms. Barnes was praised by her nominators for her initiative to make her staff more accessible to TCOE program managers, instituting regular visits to programs to work with support staff and answer questions. County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak says that she has a "keen knowledge" of human resources, a natural ability to problem-solve, and the initiative to take on

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more responsibilities when asked. Ms. Barnes and the four personnel technicians serve as resources to TCOE employees, and Tulare County and surrounding county school districts. The districts often seek Cheri's guidance when researching human resources policies and procedures. Ms. Barnes leads the department's recruitment efforts by developing job notices and screening the applications to ensure candidates meet the qualification requirements. She also supports the collective bargaining agreement process, conducts new employee training, and helps to process payroll for over 1,200 TCOE full- and part-time employees.

In terms of her service to the community, Cheri turned a tragic and life-changing event that occurred over 10 years ago into something miraculous. After her husband suffered a brain injury, she made it her calling to be the voice for brain injury in the Central San Joaquin Valley by co-founding the Jeff Barnes Brain Injury Foundation. She routinely speaks to student groups about the impact of brain injury, including concussions in sports. The foundation has distributed over 6,000 bicycle helmets to local school children and coordinated various events. This month, Ms. Barnes was honored for her community work by the Tulare County Board of Supervisors and local faith-based organizations.

## **Recognition Event**

Award recipients, finalists and nominees will be honored at a recognition breakfast beginning at 7:30 a.m. on October 17, 2012, at the Visalia Convention Center. Event attendees will enjoy a video highlighting the work of the overall winners.

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

For more information, contact Marlene Moreno, Administrative Assistant, at (559) 733-6302.

# TCOE #

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