

TCOE staff members celebrated for service milestones

This week, the Human Resources Division traditionally hosts the Longevity Awards dinner for employees who celebrated annual service milestones at the Tulare County Office of Education. While the dinner was cancelled to mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19, Human Resources will still honor a total of 130 staff members who marked their 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, or 40 years of service to the organization and the children of Tulare County. Human Resources Director John Rodriguez reports that the staff members dedicated a combined 2,300 years of service.

“While it’s disappointing that we cannot gather and celebrate your service anniversaries in person, the pandemic does not diminish the deep appreciation I have for your dedication to your work and our students,” said Tim Hire, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools.

To celebrate this year’s class of Longevity Awards recipients, Human Resources staff members worked with program administrators to develop the following short biographies on the men and women who celebrated 30- and 40-year anniversaries. A link to the list of employees who completed 10, 15, 20, and 25 years of service can be found at the end of this article.

40 YEARS

Andrea "Andi" Clark Special Services AcCEL Program

Andi Clark has spent the last 40 years pouring her love into the hearts and lives of students with moderate-to-severe disabilities as a paraprofessional in the county AcCEL Program. Andi has worked 32 of those 40 years in the AcCEL Program classroom located on the Pixley Elementary campus. She has been a steadfast and valued employee who goes above and beyond the call of duty. It is no surprise to find Andi participating in after school events, fundraising opportunities, and extracurricular activities all to benefit students and families. She has been an integral part of the AcCEL Program at Pixley Union School District, which is extremely grateful for her years of dedication and service.



30 YEARS

Oleida Encinas

Early Intervention Assistant, Special Services Bright Start Program

Thirty years of service to the families of Tulare County is a tremendous accomplishment and Oleida Encinas is an amazing teacher. She brings energy, compassion, and positivity to her work and is skilled at developing trusting relationships with children in the Bright Start Parent/Infant Program. Not only is she an outstanding coworker, but she is smart, diligent, and consistently willing to offer help and support for the benefit of her early intervention team. A colleague stated, “When I was initially hired at Bright Start, I was lucky enough to be trained by Oleida. She took the time to show me how to do my job well. I was impressed with the way she built rapport with parents and the relationships she had with the kids. I am still impressed with how well she does her job to this day. She is a special person, a joy to work with, and a friend.”



Norma Gomez

Instructional Assistant, Special Services Mild to Moderate Programs

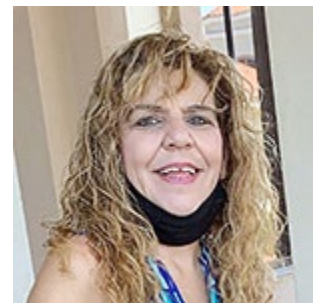
Norma began working as an instructional assistant at not one, but two school sites – Columbine School and Richgrove School. At both sites, she collaborated with RSP teachers to administer curriculum and instruction to K-8 students with special needs. She has worked the last 12 years at Alta Vista School. Her supervisors say that she is passionate about the students she serves, helping them achieve academic success. She has established an excellent rapport with them and, through her creativity and support, goes the extra mile to make sure they feel comfortable in the classroom. “Every school needs a Mrs. Gomez,” they say. Norma adds, “The greatest highlights over the last 30 years consist of witnessing student growth, making connections, and celebrating their successes. There is nothing better than seeing a student put in hard work and succeed. Thank you TCOE for making the last 30 years unforgettable!”



Catherine Johnson

Teacher, Early Childhood Education Program

A teacher at the Doyle Child Development Center, Cathie was praised by her supervisors for her ability to help others through her positive, nurturing personality. “She has an enthusiasm for teaching that has helped develop the character of hundreds of children to become successful in their futures,” they said. Cathie shows pride and patience



in her work. She works closely with her teacher assistants on how best to support the students every day, introducing and modeling new ideas, even in distance learning environments. Staff members also noted the positive relationships she has built with the families she has supported over the years to further their education for a successful future.

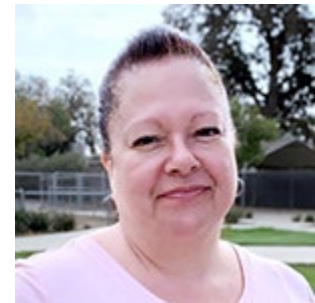
Donald Lett
Instructional Assistant, Court/Community Schools

Mr. Lett started at Tulare County Office of Education in August of 1990. Before starting his job as an instructional assistant, he served as a substitute driver for Educational Resource Services. He has worked at Superior Community School and at the Juvenile Detention Facility for the last 30 years. He enjoys his job and works well with both students and staff. He encourages students to do their best and supports all staff in any way he can. The Court/Community Schools staff appreciate Donald for all his years of service and for the impact he has made on hundreds of young lives at a time when they needed it most.



Carla Mateus
Supervisor, Early Childhood Education Program

At the age of 19, Carla began as a teacher assistant at Teenage Parenting Program (TAPP), where she loved working with the program's infants and toddlers. In 1997, Carla moved to the Maple Child Development Center as a teacher assistant, then teacher, and finally an assistant supervisor. In 2017, Carla became center supervisor at the Senaida Garcia Center located in Visalia. Employees love working with Carla because she is a team player, has a can-do attitude, is encouraging, and is a very positive and fun-loving person.



Shameem Rayani
Supervisor, Early Childhood Education Program

Shameem began as a teacher assistant at Woodville Child Development Center before becoming a teacher for 10 years at the Doyle Child Development Center. In 2000, Shameem became supervisor at the Granite Hills center, where she has focused on always providing quality learning experiences for every child who attends. Jessie Reyes, her regional supervisor, says, "Shameem will eliminate any barrier to help her families and has even learned some Spanish to assist those non-English-speaking families."



She is a warm and fuzzy person, but can also be a ferocious lion in order to get the job done and provide services for her families.”

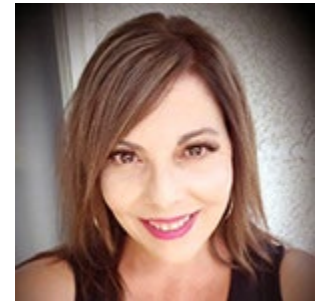
Jill Roderick
Instructional Assistant, Special Services AcCEL Program

Coworkers say that Jill Roderick truly possesses a heart of gold. In her role as instructional assistant at Porterville High School, she goes above and beyond for her students and co-workers, creating a bond and a friendship between them that is like family. Staff members appreciate her support for the program’s students and for her 30 years of work in helping them realize their success.



Celeste Rodriguez
Coordinator, Early Childhood Education Program, Connections for Quality Care

Over the past 30 years at Early Childhood Education, Celeste has seen many changes. She began her service to the program as a records clerk. While pursuing her own education, Celeste advanced to client service technician, administrative assistant and then to coordinator for the Connections for Quality Care program. Over the years, Celeste’s own family has grown as well. She is now a proud grandmother of three grandchildren, with one more on the way – all boys.



Alma Rooney
Apportionment Accounting Technician, External Business Services

Alma began as a business technician, then moved into the apportionment accounting technician position for External Business Services. As the department’s most experienced staff member, she is relied on heavily for her expertise in areas of payroll and retirement reporting. Alma’s work ethic and professional integrity set the example of what true leadership looks like at TCOE. During her time here at TCOE, Alma has also raised three successful daughters, two of which have pursued careers in education and have served students in the Tulare County community. When Alma is not at work, she spends the majority of her time being grandmother to eight beautiful grandchildren.



Rhonda Souza
Employment & Benefits Specialist, SEE & Co.

Rhonda Souza is currently serving as an employment and benefits specialist with A Ticket to Success program – a national job service provider for individuals with disabilities. In her 30 years with TCOE, she has worked with programs such as Teenage Parenting Program (TAPP), Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN), Services for Education & Employment (SEE), and More Opportunity for Viable Employment (MOVE). Under these programs, Rhonda has helped many youth and adults with finding their way to success, contributing her strong knowledge of grant and proposal development, and financial and budgeting experience. In her free time, Rhonda volunteers to help individuals going through cancer treatment by putting together care packets with some essentials and inspirational help as they deal with the difficult disease.



Scott Unser
Teacher, Special Services AcCEL Program

Colleagues commend Scott for being a team player who is willing to jump in and help others. He is also considered a great teaching resource who has built a great rapport with his students and their families over many years. The administrators and staff of Special Services AcCEL Program appreciate Scott for his great service to students with special needs.



A list of the [employees celebrating service anniversaries](#) of 10, 15, 20, and 25 years is available [online](#).

TCOE receives new funding from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation



Tulare County Office of Education's College and Career, Educational Resource Services, and Leadership Support Services departments have been working together to provide high quality, high impact, integrated services with a focus on continuous improvement, equity, and data measurement. Recently, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recognized the programs' efforts by awarding TCOE \$6.1 million to facilitate the development of a multi-year Network for School Improvement (NSI). The network will be committed to increasing the number of African American, Latinx, and socially-economically disadvantaged students who are accepted into a postsecondary institution with an institutional graduation rate of 50% or higher by 2025.

Locally known as the Central Valley Networked Improvement Community: College-Ready (CVNIC: College-Ready), the project will be comprised of 12-15 Central Valley high schools, with priority for participation being given to Tulare and Kings county schools. CVNIC: College-Ready participating schools will apply improvement science, a methodology for making change in complex systems. Improvement science will be used to uncover and address practices and policies that perpetuate systemic bias, ensure equitable course placement within rigorous A-G-aligned course work, eliminate college-access barriers, build supportive student-adult relationships, and shift adult mindsets and classroom practices to ensure academic success, particularly in mathematics.

Benefits of network participation in the multi-year program include high quality professional development, site-based coaching, regularly scheduled collaboration activities, and consultation by nationally-recognized experts in the areas of equity, counseling, improvement methodology, and secondary mathematics. CVNIC: College-Ready is complementary to the established Tulare Kings College + Career Collaborative and CVNIC: Mathematics programs. Collaborations between the three networks will be intentionally developed.

The recruitment of Tulare and Kings County high schools for network participation will begin in January with the intent to first convene the network in May 2021. For more information about

this opportunity, contact Stephanie Verners, Educational Resource Services' CVNIC: College-Ready network director, at stephanie.verners@tcoe.org.

Distance Learning Resources

- [Arts All Around Us](#)
 - [TCOE Learning at Home](#)
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