

As Seen in the **Daily Breeze** 11/25/13

About Town: Educators saluted for their passion at Rotary awards dinner



Event co-chairs and outstanding educators honored at the 2013 Educator of the Year Dinner by Palos Verdes Peninsula Rotary Club include, back row: Co-chair Jim Hartman, John Perkins and Alison Graff. Front row: Co-chair Joan Behrens, Mindy Castillo, Allison Palmer, Sheila Chatterjee and Kim Nygaard. Not pictured are honorees Kate Elortegui, Campbell Nimick, Jim Whalen and Brian Knigin.

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By Meredith Grenier

For the Peninsula's top 10 teachers — winners of the 2013 Educator of the Year awards — teaching is clearly a passion.

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At the 33rd annual Palos Verdes Peninsula Rotary Educator of the Year dinner at the Palos Verdes Golf Club, honorees spoke of that a-ha moment, when a student “gets it” — when a teacher “lit the fire” for a student or a classroom. For some, recalling that moment when teacher and student share a common spark of enlightenment was a magical experience. Several recipients became emotional when talking about the “gift” of being a teacher.

“We certainly aren’t in it for the money,” one honoree quipped, lightening the mood. “But we sometimes get apples,” another noted.

By extension, the evening was a tribute to all teachers. Educator of the Year Committee co-chair Jim Hartman in welcoming guests said: “Our teachers are the caring people in our society. We honor the teachers and their staffs. They are the optimists, they are the role models and they lead the way.” Joan Behrens was the other co-chair.

The 2013 honorees are Allison Palmer, Rancho Vista Elementary School; Sheila Chatterjee, College for Officer Training at Crestmont; **Kim Nygaard, Peninsula Heritage School**; Kate Elortegui, Chadwick School; Mindy Castillo, Silver Spur Elementary School; Campbell Nimick, Miraleste Intermediate School; Allison Graf, St. John Fisher School; Jim Whalen, Palos Verdes High School; John Kenneth Perkins, Marymount California University; and Brian Knigin, Rolling Hills Preparatory School.

Honorees were given clocks from Medawar Fine Jewelers and a host of commendations. They also received the “EOTY” pin, a keepsake that “few are selected to receive — the best amongst the great.”

Many of the honorees said they had been inspired to pursue education by former teachers or relatives. Others, like Mindy Castillo from Silver Spur School, said they were born to teach.

Several hundred of the district’s top professionals were in attendance, including district Superintendent Walker Williams, who had learned that afternoon that four Peninsula schools had been nominated as 2014 California Distinguished Schools in the elementary school category: Cornerstone, Silver Spur, Point Vicente and Vista Grande.

One recipient, Kate Elortegui, who has been a teacher at Chadwick School since 2004, missed the evening’s festivities. “She has spearheaded committees, she has traveled abroad with our students, she teaches them to be citizens of the world, she teaches the whole student and three days ago she produced a whole child,” explained T. Frederick Hill, who accepted the award in her absence.

The evening’s major donors include the D.K. Kim Foundation, Southern California Edison, Torrance Memorial Hospital Health Care Foundation, Hang-Up Moon, Tridus International Inc., State Farm Insurance, Matson Foundation, John Cameron, Toyota Motor Sales, USA and Jackie and Roger Ignon, among others.

Proceeds from the evening will go to the Rotary Club’s scholarship fund. For information, call 310-265-6217.