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## Recognizing that special spark - Orinda School District honors its teachers

Submitted by *Sylvia Jorgensen*

Teacher of the Year Carol Levin, left, stands next to superintendent Carolyn Seaton and Orinda Rotary president Weylin Eng. Photo provided  
substandards.

Orinda has a long tradition celebrating the educators of its school district; after all, schools are the first reason people move to or stay in the city. This year the new superintendent of schools, Carolyn Seaton, has proposed a different, more systematic approach to go about the Teacher of the Year selection. The teachers were honored on May 2 during a luncheon hosted by the Orinda Rotary Club. This year's best of the best is Glorietta Elementary School first-grade teacher Carol Levin.

Seaton, who has a doctorate in education from USC, proposed using the National Board for Teaching Standards and its criteria to certify teachers as the grid to select the best teachers. Five standards were reviewed: commitment to students and their learning; knowledge of the subjects taught and how to teach those subjects to students; responsibility exhibited in the management and monitoring of student learning; systematic thinking about teaching practice and learning from experience; and involvement in learning communities. Each of the standards were detailed with

During her presentation at the luncheon, the superintendent explained that each member of staff were encouraged to submit nominations in each of the district's schools, then the principals used the standards grid to select the teacher of the year for that site. A committee then visited the classrooms of these selected few, interviewed them, and made the hard choice: selecting the best of the best in the district.

The lighthearted and often moving ceremony celebrated each teacher chosen for each school.

The first teacher selected was Danee Jurichko, inclusion specialist at Orinda Intermediate School. Jurichko, who had started in the school district as an aid, got so passionate about special education that she went back to school to get her credential and returned to make an impact. Her dedication and professionalism were highlighted.

Sleepy Hollow Elementary School kindergarten teacher Jessica Greer was the second nominee. Greer's classroom was described as a place of wonder and learning where each child is acknowledged and respected. She was called a very gifted teacher.

Kevin Cutler, who is married to Greer (they met at OIS), is the technology coach for the district and was recognized as a superman, non-assuming and humble, a tenacious thinker who runs with ideas and delivers results.

Third-grade teacher Marta Wallace from Del Rey Elementary was the next nominee. A former attorney, she started by volunteering in the classroom before going back to school to get her credential. She has taught for 13 years, was said to have a special knack for special needs students, and is passionate about working with her colleagues.

Julie Ritzman, second-grade teacher at Wagner Ranch Elementary, was acknowledged for the joy she brings to her job and her students. She was called an exemplar educator, always positive, with students who believe in her.

The final nominee, Levin, was selected as Orinda School District teacher of the year. Levin was called a "queen of differentiation" who can bring learning to life. Levin was said to really know each of her students, making learning fun. She has been an educator for 35 years, with 20 of those spent with the OSD. She commented that she could be at her best only when supported by others, the community of teachers and the parents; for her, teaching children is a collaborative effort. She will retire at the end of the school year.

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[back](#)