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Recognizing that special spark – Orinda School District honors its teachers

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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 substandards.

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 vol-

unteering 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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