

COMMUNITY

Hermiston School District announces its educators of the year

BY MAEGAN MURRAY
HERMISTON HERALD

Since joining the Hermiston School District in 2009, Jon Mishra has served in many positions, from principal to executive director of special programs.

This year, Mishra was rewarded for all of his work when he was named the district's administrator of the year at Tuesday's School Board meeting.

Mishra said the award came to him as a complete surprise.

"I was in shock at first," Mishra said. "I kept looking around going 'Is this real?'"

Mishra said even though it feels good to be rewarded for all his work, he said the team with which he works deserves the credit in helping to make the Hermiston School District what it is today.

"It is the systems of support we have in place," he said. "We are a well-run district. All the folks I work with, we all realize our goal is to be premier in everything we do. Having those structures in place have allowed me to be successful."

After serving as a middle school principal in Coos Bay, Oregon, Mishra moved to Hermiston in 2009 to become the Sandstone Middle School principal. Shortly after, however, he became the principal at Armand Larive Middle School.

Superintendent Fred Maiocco said in both assignments, he did exceptionally well.

"While middle school achievement improved, staff morale improved and collaboration thrived," he said.

Then, in 2011, in what Maiocco said as the result of his great work at the middle school level, Mishra was promoted to director of operations and business services, where he streamlined various business practices and processes and improved communication throughout the schools.

"He took time throughout the year to visit each building administrator and seek input about how these services could better thrive and support the work going on in our classrooms," Maiocco said.

In 2014, he was promoted to executive director for the special programs department. Maiocco said he has worked to reorient the special programs department to be part of the premier vision that the Hermiston School District has.

"His hard work and willingness to do what is right is already having a tremen-

dously positive impact on our schools," Maiocco said.

Maiocco said Mishra has navigated the challenges of the special programs department expertly and that student learning has increased because he uses a combination of common sense, commitment to families and compliance with all legal requirements to make decisions in the students' best interest.

Maiocco said Mishra's peers say he is a valuable asset who is always willing to fill the gap where he is needed and puts the district and students' needs before his own.

"He never ducks away from hard decisions, but he always meets those difficult moments with honesty and integrity," Maiocco relayed from one of Mishra's peers.

Mishra and the Hermiston School District's 10 educators of the year will be honored during the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's Distinguished Citizens Award banquet Feb. 4 at the Hermiston Conference Center. The event will begin with a social at 6 p.m. Dinner will begin at 6:30 p.m., and awards will be presented at 7 p.m. The event will be catered by Simply Catering. Tickets cost \$30 and may be purchased at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce.

The following are teachers who were chosen as educators of the year:

Cathy Duffy, District-wide educator of the year

Duffy works with 18- to 21-year-olds in the transition program at the Kik Center. Mishra said he would compare Duffy's program to Disneyland because "magic happens in Duffy's program and Duffy is the magician."

He said her students are always out in the community working with their community-based learning. Mishra said one of the people who nominated Duffy describes her as dedicated, selfless, committed and collaborative. Other people said Duffy has a real heart for the students in her program and cares for them and their futures and works collaboratively with all staff, administration, students and parents in order to meet the needs of her students and families.

Joseph Thornton, Hermiston High School

Thornton teaches in the Innovative Learning Center where he helps students who struggle in the regular high school setting. HHS Principal Jocelyn Jones said Thornton is the students' greatest advocate and helps students who



Hermiston Superintendent Fred Maiocco talks about the accomplishments of Jon Mishra, the executive director of special programs for the Hermiston School District, right, as his family stands in the background. Mishra was named administrator of the year for the HSD.

might want to give up keep moving forward. She said he has been instrumental in helping many students find their educational pathways, whether it be with a diploma or a GED. Jones said he routinely brings in members of the community to share about their careers and does as much as he can to take students out of the classroom to experience life and help them explore their interests. Outside of school, he is active in his church and volunteers his time with several community programs.

Josh Browning, Hermiston High School

Browning teaches English and communication at Hermiston High School. He said he is dedicated to giving his students high levels of instruction and understands the value of building respect and trust. He also tries to learn more about each student on a daily basis. Jones said Browning achieves the perfect balance between sociability and professionalism, creating an environment conducive to learning for all his students. She said he is positive and respectful with his colleagues and gives useful advice that is to the point. Jones said he was quick to incorporate the Chromebook labs into his instruction and shares newfound skills and ideas with staff. After school, Jones coaches the golf team.

Chelsea Bergstrom, Armand Larive Middle School

Bergstrom is a math teacher at Armand Larive Middle School. Principal Tom Spoo said Bergstrom, in addition to ensuring her students are growing academically, prides herself on knowing her students and building relationships. He said she also helps with extracurricular activities and works with many students after school. Bergstrom,

Spoo said, sets high expectations and refuses to accept mediocrity. At the same time, he said, she makes her class fun and interesting. She also works well with others and creates a comfortable working environment. Her fellow staff members describe her as "chipper" and always says hello to anyone she passes in the hallway.

Tracy Hodges, Sandstone Middle School

Hodges is an English language learning teacher at Sandstone Middle School. Principal Larry Usher said her peers describe Hodges as someone who inspires a love of learning in all of her students by setting high standards and sharing confidence in her students' abilities. He said Hodges has put in countless hours to earn her students' trust and assurances. She also works to not only meet students' needs, but those of their families, as well. Usher said, on a personal note, Hodges is an "unbelievable resource and incredible professional" in the Sandstone building. He said he couldn't ask for a better teammate.

Linda Mruk, Desert View Elementary School

Mruk is a kindergarten teacher at Desert View Elementary School. Principal Michael Roberts said if he were to compare education with building a house, Mruk's students have the best foundation. He said Mruk encourages her students to love school. Roberts said, last year, Mruk's kindergarten class reached 94 percent proficiency in reading. She was also the only teacher voted unanimously to the leadership team during the election. He said she was also surprised to be honored with educator of the year because she is so humble and doesn't realize just how great of a teacher she is.

Susan Thurman, Highland Hills Elementary School

Thurman teaches fourth grade at Highland Hills Elementary School. Principal Brad Bixler said Thurman builds a foundation for her students, not only academically, but at citizens. He said her efforts to help shape students into young adults who have the courage and wisdom to make the right choices, understand right and wrong and realize that hard work has it rewards regardless of the outcome. Thurman was presented a Generation College Award in 2009 by a Hermiston High School student who remembered the impact Thurman had on her education. Bixler said he learned this week Thurman will retire after this year. He said her positive impact on students is felt throughout the Highland Hills building and he is so proud and honored that he had the chance to work with her.

Ibbet Velasquez, Rocky Heights Elementary School

Velasquez teaches first grade at Rocky Heights Elementary School. Principal BJ Wilson said this past summer, the school made T-shirts that said "Striving to be better than we've ever been," and Velasquez does each day. He said

she is a master teacher but is always looking for that next best thing to help students in her classroom. He said she works tirelessly to help all her students get where they need to be academically. He said Velasquez absolutely deserves the award, and he can't think of a better person who he would want to teach first-grade student.

Susan Scheibner Sunset Elementary School

Scheibner is a second-grade teacher at Sunset Elementary School. Principal Devin Grigg said he would normally use his own words to express how wonderful she is, but, instead, he enlisted the words of students. Her students said that Scheibner is the greatest teacher because she is able to teach them math and does fun things to help them learn. Her students said she also makes them happy, is helpful, is pretty, truly cares about her students and is the "bestest" teacher anyone can dream of. Grigg said, when Scheibner learned she received this year's award, she gave credit to everyone around her, which makes her the greatest team member and teacher.

Suanne Fitzgerald, West Park Elementary School

Suanne Fitzgerald is a fifth-grade teacher at West Park Elementary School. Principal Kevin Headings said when people think of educator effectiveness and teacher quality, they would immediately think of Fitzgerald. He said, at West Park, the mission statement is "to engage all students at high levels of learning" and when he walks into Fitzgerald's classroom, he sees that is happening. He said her students are routinely engaged, and she makes the most mundane whole-class reading activity exciting and fun. Headings said the one thing that stands out most about Fitzgerald is how strong of an advocate she is for her students. He said he is very proud and quite frankly thinks Fitzgerald is also the "bestest" teacher.

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BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION

McNary Substation Project Notice

From January 2015 to December 2017, the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) will make major improvements to the McNary Substation in Umatilla, Oregon. The substation improvements are necessary to meet the growing power needs in the area, to integrate new generating resources, and to support a safe and reliable BPA transmission system.

The project will physically expand the substation and include the installation of power transformers, circuit breakers, disconnect switches, and other equipment.

Construction activities will normally take place on weekdays between the hours of 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. There will be increased noise levels typically associated with construction activities and, at times, there will be a slower traffic flow on Hwy 730 due to the movement of heavy equipment. For your safety, please be aware of construction activities and equipment in the area around the substation.

Your patience and cooperation during this time of construction are appreciated.

For more information please visit www.bpa.gov/goto/McNary or contact the BPA Project Manager Amy Gardner toll free at 800-282-3717 or amgardner@bpa.gov.