

EDUCATION:

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“We continue to be a resource after kids graduate high school or college,” Marvin said of the Career and Counseling Center where she works. “If I didn’t get to work with kids, I probably still wouldn’t be doing this,” she said.

BEYOND TESTING

Garth Lind, the district’s top teacher for 2016, is a little embarrassed about receiving the award.

“It’s awkward getting an award for yourself when it’s part of what your team does,” the fifth grade teacher said.

Sitting in a classroom at Hermiston’s Desert View Elementary with his three colleagues, Lind says everything he’s achieved as a teacher has been matched by his colleagues — Dia Bernabe, Janey McCormack and Rachel Lind (his wife).

“It’s easier to be out of the spotlight, just doing your thing,” Lind said. “Any successes I’ve had has come from my team.”

At the ceremony Lind was praised for his ability to connect with students and colleagues, further his own teaching skills, and turn out consistently above-average test scores. According to district statistics, 87 percent of students in Lind’s class over the past three years have scored at benchmark or above on the Science OAKS assessment — 21 percent above the state average. His students have also shown an average growth of 55 points on the Smarter Balanced Assessment in Language Arts, compared to a statewide expectation of 32 points. Lind’s classes have grown an average of 75 points in math scores, against an expected growth of 40 points.

“Garth is such a motivator,” Bernabe said. “And he has such a rapport with students.”

Lind has taught for 20 years — 17 with the Hermiston School District, and a few in Umatilla and Toppenish, Washington. This is his fourth year back in elementary school after a stint at Hermiston High.

Lind said his students have benefited from the close relationship the four teachers have.

“It’s like one giant classroom with four doors,” Lind said. “It’s a seamless educational experience for the kids.”



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Desert View Elementary fifth grade teacher Garth Lind was named the Hermiston School District’s educator of the year at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce’s Distinguished Citizens Awards Banquet on Wednesday in Hermiston.

That philosophy has extended to all aspects of teaching, Lind said. Though he has been lauded for high test scores, Lind said the entire fifth grade team has the same philosophy when it comes to state assessments.

“We don’t focus on it,” he said. Instead of teaching specifically for test preparation, he said the group teaches to the academics instead.

“We teach more foundational skills,” he said. “Our goal is to put our kids academically ahead. If Smarter Balanced ends up being something our kids do well on, that’s good.”

He said he and his team don’t get caught up in the idea of “teaching to the test.”

“Smart is smart,” Lind said. “Do we teach the standards? Yes. But if you can do math, and think at a high level, you’re going to do fine. What lets me sleep is knowing that my kids are prepared to go beyond high school.”

Lind said his favorite



STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN

Liz Marvin, the Project College Bound coordinator at Hermiston High School, meets with a group of students to discuss a college visit this weekend.

subject to teach is writing. “There’s no boundaries to it,” he said. “It can be creative, informative — there’s an infinite amount of ways to go about it.”

DRIVEN TO SERVE

Elias Ismael Arenas is hoping he’ll get to follow

the two things he’s always loved: sports and helping people.

The senior is in the school’s National Honor Society, a volunteer organization, as well as a four-year soccer and track and

field athlete. Outside of school, he volunteers often, especially at dinners and auctions held at the Hermiston Conference Center.

Arenas plans to attend college after high school, and is looking at Blue

Mountain Community College, Eastern Oregon University, and George Fox University. He hopes to continue to play soccer, and study athletic training to merge his two passions.

“I’ve always liked being around sports, so I figure if I can get a career being around sports, I’ll be happy — and also helping people one-one-one,” he said.

He also hopes to continue volunteering.

“For as long as I can remember I’ve always liked helping people,” he said. “Whatever community I end up in — hopefully I get to stay in Hermiston — I’d continue to volunteer in any way I can.”

WON’T SLOW DOWN

Vanessa Ambriz-Mendoza is busy with school, work and many clubs — but the Hermiston High School senior has no intention of slowing down when she goes to college.

She balances several responsibilities outside of school: working as a sales associate at Payless, as well as participating in several clubs: Key Club, Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation, the Speech and Debate Club and the College Savings Group. She tries to help out in the community whenever she can at the Agape House and at local churches.

“I really do believe in volunteering,” she said.

Ambriz-Mendoza is thinking about studying International Relations, and hopes to attend Whitman College in Walla Walla.

“It’s an amazing program,” she said of Whitman. “It’s a liberal arts school with a small group of students.”

Of her award, Ambriz-Mendoza said she was shocked, but thrilled by the honor.

“I try to be involved in the community as much as I can,” she said.

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