



Irvine Unified School District

5050 Barranca Parkway, Irvine, California 92604-4652 / 949.936.5000 / FAX 949.936.5259 / www.iusd.org

Media Contact: Ian Hanigan
Public Information Officer
Phone: (949) 936-5002
Fax: (949) 936-5259
ihanigan@iusd.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, May 21, 2008

Five IUSD workers recognized as 2008 Classified Employees of the Year *Honorees are praised for going 'above and beyond' to benefit Irvine schools*

IRVINE, Calif. – Local representatives of the California School Employees Association (CSEA), in cooperation with the Irvine Unified School District (IUSD), have selected five exceptional IUSD employees to be this year's Classified Employees of the Year.

The honorees – a guidance assistant, a campus control assistant, an administrative secretary, a transportation dispatcher and a head custodian – were surprised with the news at their work sites on Wednesday, May 21, during the state-recognized Classified School Employees Week.

“Every day, classified employees play a vital role in this district, enabling all of the successes that occur in and out of our classrooms,” said Superintendent of Schools Gwen E. Gross. “In particular, the five individuals that we celebrate today have exhibited energy, integrity and diligence while going above and beyond their regular job descriptions to support our students.”

The 2008 Classified Employees of the Year are:

- **Grace Bennett, guidance assistant, Guidance Resources.** An IUSD asset for 20-plus years, Grace was nominated by the staff at Deerfield Elementary School, where she is engrained in the culture. Colleagues say Grace promotes safety, tolerance and problem-solving and is a team player who is always willing to step in whenever and wherever she's needed. Moreover, her ability to develop relationships with students has greatly impacted their growth and achievement.
- **Marie Keller, security, Irvine High School.** Respected and loved by students and staff alike, Marie is primarily responsible for keeping the campus safe. However, she has taken on a multitude of other roles, including counselor, parent, friend, confidant and event planner. From caring for stray animals to painting prom posters, Marie does her job with compassion, creativity and zeal.
- **Jenna Kurtenacker, administrative secretary, Education Services.** Highly respected by her colleagues, Jenna is motivated, organized and extremely hardworking. She's also a

BOARD OF EDUCATION

GAVIN HUNTLEY-FENNER, Ph.D. / SUE KUWABARA / CAROLYN McINERNEY / MICHAEL PARHAM / SHARON WALLIN

GWEN E. GROSS, Ph.D., *Superintendent of Schools*
VERNON MEDEIROS, Ed.D., *Deputy Superintendent, Business Services*
CASSIE PARHAM, *Assistant Superintendent, Education Services* / TERRY WALKER, *Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources*

IUSD ... providing the highest quality educational experience we can envision.

model of consistency who takes on challenging assignments while anticipating next steps. Despite her enormous contributions, she inspires others by being upbeat and humble.

- **Rebecca “Becky” Lopez, dispatcher, Transportation Department.** Becky ensures students are transported to and from school safely, exhibiting extreme diligence and patience. Epitomizing a positive spirit and a can-do attitude, she goes above and beyond her job description, assigning route changes, overseeing the scheduling of late starts and early-outs and making sure drivers are aware of students’ special needs.
- **Sal Manzo, head custodian, Deerfield Elementary School.** Deerfield Elementary School is clean, safe and well-functioning thanks to the man known affectionately as Mr. Sal. If a door lock gets stuck, Sal is there to repair it; if a light is flickering, Sal takes care of it immediately to minimize the distraction for children. In addition to being hardworking and efficient, colleagues say he’s always positive, supportive and modest.

This year’s Classified Employees of the Year were chosen by a committee made up of eight members, including local CSEA President Janelle Cranch, IUSD Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Terry Walker, Human Resources Director Rena Thompson and the five winners from last year.

Nomination forms were sent out to all schools and district sites in April, and the committee received dozens of submissions. Committee members narrowed the field to five after interviewing a cross-section of each nominee’s coworkers by telephone.

With so many outstanding candidates to choose from, Cranch said the committee looked for those who pushed beyond the limits of their job descriptions to make a positive impact.

“The selection process is extremely comprehensive, ensuring impartiality and fairness,” Cranch said. “As a result, the five stellar employees that we honor today are the best of the best.”

All five Classified Employees of the Year will each receive \$1,000 thanks to sponsors Kirk and Deena Fausett of the Resource Management Group – the couple generously donated a raffle prize that includes airfare and accommodations to Hawaii – and the SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union, formerly known as the Orange County Teachers Federal Credit Union.

Represented by CSEA, classified employees include secretaries, custodians, paraeducators, bus drivers, maintenance technicians, clerks, food services staff members and other district workers. To honor their contributions, IUSD’s Board of Education passed a resolution Tuesday night proclaiming the week of May 19 through May 23 “Classified School Employee Week.”

###