



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Dee Mulkey Coyle Middle School in Garland

Teacher uses enthusiasm, creativity to share love of language

Lucky people are often described as those who are in the right place at the right time. The students of Dee Mulkey, 7th- and 8th-grade Spanish teacher at Coyle Middle School, may be luckier than most because she's in the right place at the right time.

Ms. Mulkey began her teaching career about 22 years ago.

"It's either 21 or 22; after all these years, they just all run together," Ms. Mulkey laughs.

She is a graduate of Texas A&M University with a degree in Education, Curriculum and Instruction. She also obtained her English as a Second Language (ESL) certification, but found herself putting that expertise on the back burner as she began her teaching career at the elementary level.

"My husband was in the oil business, and we moved a lot, so I taught all over the place," she says. Once the couple found their way to Garland, she taught in districts in the area, finally settling in Garland for good, "because I loved it."

After 15 years of elementary-level teaching, Ms. Mulkey heard about an opening for a Spanish teacher at Coyle Middle School.

"I had never been able to use my specialization in Spanish, so that really appealed to me," she says.

The rest is history. Ms. Mulkey has been teaching Spanish to 7th and 8th graders ever since.

"This job is the perfect combination of my skills," she says. "Because I'm teaching Spanish to these kids from the ground up, it's almost like teaching elementary students to read English."

Her years in elementary education taught her that teaching kids to read wasn't enough: They had to learn to love to read.

"I've brought that same enthusiasm to teaching Spanish," she says. "I try to impress on the kids that if they get a good education, and if they're bilingual, a lot of doors will be open to them."

Ms. Mulkey engages students by going "out of the book" to make learning fun and interactive.

"We often sing current American rock songs in Spanish, and the kids love that. Really, every day is different so they never know what to expect," she says.

It seems that this style of learning really gets through to the students.

"I've heard that when they get to high school, they ask their Spanish teachers whether they'll be having a 'song of the week.' They expect the same level of fun learning to continue in high school," Ms. Mulkey says.

It should come as no surprise that Ms. Mulkey's creative teaching methods ease the way for her students to learn without realizing it. She said her students are well prepared to continue Spanish in high school, and some even place out of Spanish II and move right into Spanish III.

Coyle Middle School Principal Dretha Burns appreciates the Spanish teacher's commitment to making the process of learning a good experience for students.

"Her instruction is highly effective," she says. "The high school teachers who get her students are so pleased with them because they're so well prepared for high school Spanish. Even as freshmen, they're ready for sophomore-level Spanish."

Ms. Burns cites a few other unconventional teaching methods Ms. Mulkey uses to teach — and entertain.

"Her students put on 'Little Red Riding Hood' in Spanish for the other students, and it was so enjoyable," says Mrs. Burns. "When the students work on the unit about food, they design a menu, prepare the food, and serve it. Ms. Mulkey is also a leader in the Cinco de Mayo celebration that we have every year."

In addition to her teaching career, Ms. Mulkey is also the mother of three children aged 22, 19, and 12. Her husband, who left the oil business and entered the teaching field himself, is a computer science instructor at a middle school in Rowlett. As if all those responsibilities weren't enough, Ms. Mulkey also teaches adult ESL students at Eastfield Community College in Mesquite in the evenings and on weekends. "I just love teaching, and I have lots of energy," Ms. Mulkey says.

It seems that all of Ms. Mulkey's students benefit from her enthusiasm and knowledge.

"The fact that Ms. Mulkey teaches adults English gives her a good grasp of the processes involved in language acquisition," says Ms. Burns. "She has sharpened those skills, and it benefits her students here at Coyle."



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