



# PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



## Michael O'Malley Music made the difference for high school history teacher

As Michael O'Malley studied hard through college in

preparation for a career as a banker, he was introduced to the music of Public Enemy and the Dead Kennedys. This musical exposure led him to question his goals.

"Their music caused me to begin questioning what I was doing. It asked, 'Can you look at yourself in the mirror and be proud of how you're contributing to society?'"

Hip-hop might not be usual inspiration for a teaching career, but Mr. O'Malley hasn't turned out to be the usual kind of teacher. His commitment to his profession led him to South Garland High School, where he has taught for three years. For two of those years, he has also been the school's Academic Decathlon teacher, a role that allows him to use his certification in all high-school disciplines.

Mr. O'Malley says Academic Decathlon students are primarily A, B and C students, and he works to help them find "their intellectual spark." However, he adds that the biggest challenge he encounters as a high school history and economics teacher is reaching students at all different levels.

He says he achieves that goal by "finding relevant examples that all students can relate to. Then you see that light go on," the payoff that most teachers find to be the biggest reward of their profession.

"Even though there may be cultural or language barriers, it's incumbent on me to get the point across to all students," Mr. O'Malley says.

It seems apparent that his dedication to this goal is paying off.

"Michael does an outstanding job in the classroom with our students. His No. 1 consideration in all matters is his students. He constantly thinks about what is best for

them and how they will benefit from what he does in class. He uses a variety of techniques to engage each student during the class period and he does a great job of making each student feel that he/she is the most important student in class," says South Garland High School principal Charles Rose.

Mr. O'Malley says that some of his most treasured compliments come from former students. He remembers one in particular from the South Oak Cliff school where he taught for nine years before coming to Garland.

"This student was always in trouble, and she told me that she had always hated social studies – until she got to my class. She said, 'I always used to skip that class, but I never skipped your class,'" he says.

The key to reaching even the most difficult students, Mr. O'Malley says, is to "try to make it fun, to be passionate about teaching. If I'm into it, so are my students," he says.

Mr. O'Malley and his wife, Serena, a Garland ISD bilingual kindergarten teacher, moved to Rowlett about a dozen years ago to be closer to Ms. O'Malley's family. The couple has two girls, ages 11 and 8, and a 7-month-old son.

He will always be a teacher – Mr. O'Malley says a role as an administrator isn't for him. "They have to serve too many masters. That's not my personality."

Instead, he says he recognizes one primary reason to teach: "You're going to leave the earth a better place than you found it," he says.

Spoken like a dedicated professional who can definitely answer in the affirmative the question posed by his favorite hip-hop artists: "Can you be proud of how you're contributing to society?"

South Garland High School's students are the fortunate beneficiaries of Mr. O'Malley's career change and his commitment to the teaching profession.



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