



# PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



## Bernadita Pinto

### Teacher gives kindergarteners a great start

Call it fate, call it destiny or call it just plain luck. When circumstances fall so

perfectly into place, the result is pure magic. Such was the case for Bernadita Pinto, Garland's Teacher of the Month.

After five years of university study in her native Chile, Ms. Pinto earned her teaching degree and taught English for 15 years.

"During that time, I taught nearly every grade, including university level," Ms. Pinto says. She expected her career to continue on that track until she was presented with an irresistible opportunity.

"I came to the U.S. as an exchange student through the Rotary Club in 1998," she says. "I came to the Dallas area - and what a great experience it was. I was here for about a month and a half, and found people to be so nice. When I went back to Chile, my principal there showed me an ad he had found. North Carolina was looking for teachers from all over the world, and he encouraged me to apply. That was in May; by August, my two girls and I had moved to North Carolina!"

Once she and her family had settled in, Ms. Pinto called some of the friends she had made in Dallas to tell them she was living in the States.

"They said, 'You can't be there! We want you here in Dallas!' and in 1999, I came," she recalls. "I began teaching kindergarten at Club Hill Elementary, and I've been here ever since."

Ms. Pinto says she and her daughters, then ages 7 and 9, were thrilled to relocate to Garland. At the time of their move to the U.S., her youngsters didn't speak English, and the North Carolina school district didn't offer English as a Second Language (ESL). They were much more comfortable learning in Garland, where they were able to transition to English through the school's ESL program.

Ms. Pinto says her professional background meshed well with the Garland ESL program as well.

"We teach our kindergarten students to read and write in Spanish, and spend 45 minutes on ESL each day. Our goal is to have the students exit the bilingual program in second grade."

Because she and her family lived the experience of transitioning from Spanish to English, she says she feels uniquely qualified to help others in the same situation.

But ESL encompasses far more than just language, says the teacher.

"I try to teach not only academics, but also life skills and prepare them for their years ahead, even though they're so young."

She imparts the importance of reading, honesty, respect and striving to do your best, as well as other life lessons, to her students.

The impact of teaching by example cannot be underestimated, she believes.

"I've had a parent tell me that they have seen their children 'playing school' with siblings and friends, being the teacher and acting like me," she says.

Watching her young charges make progress and thrive is a priceless experience.

"By January, most students are reading and understanding," she says. "I've had parents come to me crying, because they can't believe what their children have accomplished."

Children of kindergarten age are a particular joy to teach, she says. "Some cry for weeks because they have to leave their mommies, but soon, they get very attached to me. They depend on their teachers and become close."

"If you love them, everything will just come," she says. "If they feel comfortable and safe, they'll work hard for you."

It's that kind of caring and dedication that earned Ms. Pinto the Club Hill Elementary Teacher of the Year honor for the 2004-05 school year.



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