

## West Contra Costa Ed Fund recognizes excellence in teaching

By Shelly Meron  
Contra Costa Times

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Educators and community members will gather for an event next month honoring outstanding teachers, staff, students and volunteers.

The 22nd annual Excellence in Education Banquet is put on by the local nonprofit Ed Fund, which supports public education in West Contra Costa by giving out classroom and school grants, scholarships and teaching awards. The event serves as a fundraiser for the group, and this year's banquet is focused on the use of technology and literature.

"We're really excited about our winners and want to give them the opportunity to be acknowledged by their peers and the community," said Jennifer Henry, executive director of the Ed Fund.

Six teachers will receive a Teaching Excellence Award, including Kathy Clemons, a kindergarten instructor at Grant Elementary in Richmond. She's incorporated various technology into her lessons to help students learn to read, including Skype, a software program that lets users call each other over the Internet and see each other through webcams.

Clemons helps her students use Skype with kids in other classrooms at Grant, or even with students in other schools, or other states.

"The kids are able to read their work to each other, as well as to other educators. That motivates them — they just can't wait to get their chance to Skype to another classroom, or have another teacher from another city or state hear their work," Clemons said. "They love it. It's given them a lot

of confidence. They have pride in their work, and it holds their attention longer. And they're learning, and they're having fun learning."

Claudia Velez, who teaches second grade at Olinda Elementary and will receive a Teaching Excellence Award, uses an unconventional approach to focus on reading. Because students come to her with different reading levels and learning styles, Velez has incorporated a multi-sensory approach. Her students not only see letters and words written on the chalkboard or the paper in front of them, but also clap or tap their desks along to syllables, or use tiles with letters on them to literally build words.

Other Teaching Excellence awards go to Antonietta Franco, Lucy Giusto, Cynthia Taylor and Armando Torres. Megan Gardner and Dottie Heckman pick up Honorable Mentions.

The Distinguished Non-Certificated Employee award will go to Jan Etingoff, and the Distinguished Citizen award to Margaret Morkowski. Scholarships winners will be named at the banquet.

if you go

- What: West Contra Costa Public Education Fund 22nd annual Excellent in Education Banquet.

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# CONTRA COSTA TIMES

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- When: May 14. Cocktails and silent auction begin at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner, auction and awards at 6:30 p.m.
- Where: Doubletree Hotel, 200 Marina Blvd., Berkeley.
- Cost: \$75 adults, \$35 students.
- Details: Last day to RSVP is today online at [www.edfundwest.org](http://www.edfundwest.org) or by calling 510-233-1464.

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# The Ed. Fund 2010 Teaching Excellence Awards

**t**he Ed. Fund is honoring exceptional teachers, students, staff and volunteers of West Contra Costa Unified School district at the 22nd Annual Excellence in Education Banquet on Friday, May 14th at the Berkeley Doubletree Hotel. All are welcome to join the West Contra Costa community at this wonderful event.

For 27 years The Ed. Fund has served the students and teachers of West County's public schools. Through grants made to teachers, arts and music programs, after school programming, funding for special projects, and college scholarships for high school seniors, The Ed. Fund has given learning opportunities to countless students. In 2010, The Ed. Fund is awarding over \$60,000 in scholarships to accomplished students, helping them to realize their dreams of attending college.

Six Teaching Excellence Award winners will be honored at the Banquet, all sharing a devotion to teaching, a passion for learning, and a drive to offer the best education possible to their students. Excellence in Education is more than being a good teacher, it is about commitment, teamwork, inspiration, high standards, and helping students help themselves. Alongside the teachers, 27 scholarship winners, an employee and volunteer will be recognized for their outstanding work.

## 2010 TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS



**KATHY CLEMONS**  
Kindergarten, Grant  
Elementary School

A kind, caring person who opens new worlds to Kindergarteners through learning, Kathy Clemons has been a beloved teacher for over 30 years. Believing that her young students can and will achieve, the little ones eagerly learn reading and writing, as well as how to be life-long learners. An open

door policy to her room encourages parents to participate

in her workshops including "Family Literacy Night." An exceptional teacher, Kathy brings innovation and excitement to her classroom, encouraging students, parents and fellow teachers alike.



**ANTONIETA FRANCO**  
3rd grade, E.M. Downer  
Elementary School

A roomful of excited children is one thing, but teaching bilingual third graders is a challenge accepted by few. Antonietta Franco has devoted over 30 years to teaching in immigrant communities, and has found success with her students while creating an education community with parents. A creative and highly

respected teacher at Downer Elementary, Antonietta pushes herself as hard as her students, using her personal time to learn new teaching techniques. Based on her own experience as a Spanish-speaking student, Antonietta knows how to inspire English fluency while developing a sense of empowerment and possibility in her students.



**LUCY GIUSTO**  
7th & 8th grade English,  
Hercules Middle/High  
School

Lucy Giusto's English classes are about more than just essays and reading. Lucy encourages students to use what they have learned in other classes to help with their understanding of novels, and she believes in teaching her students to read not only for facts but to think critically

about what they read. With notable enthusiasm, Lucy is an advocate for literacy, taking time for additional training, helping coordinate the spelling bee, and more. From reading on the computer to curling up with a good book, Lucy helps create lifelong bonds between students and literature.



**CYNTHIA TAYLOR**  
**6th grade, Dover**  
**Elementary School**

As students learn in Cynthia Taylor's class, more than their grades demonstrate what they've learned. Photos and video document inventive math classes, creative ways of teaching bilingual students, field trips, and more. Student failure is not an option for Cynthia, who goes after grants to fund exciting projects that encourage students in their quest for knowledge.

In this spirit, she helps organize Parent Math Night and Parent Literacy Night, furthering the close connection between student's learning and support at home. Cynthia is an invaluable asset to her school and community.



**ARMANDO TORRES**  
**9th & 10th grade History,**  
**Richmond High School**

Armando Torres not only brings history to life in his classroom, he does it in two languages. Armando uses books, life stories, video, music, and in-class visits to engage his bilingual students. A Richmond High graduate himself, Armando relates to his students, and they find in him a role model, teacher

and friend. Standards are kept high in and out of class; Armando is known to spend his time visiting students at home and even assisting fellow teachers with their bilingual home visits. He teaches that students have a responsibility to themselves and their communities, a way of living that Armando also exemplifies. From field trips to history tests, there is magic in Armando's classroom.



**CLAUDIA VELEZ**  
**2nd Grade, Olinda**  
**Elementary School**

In addition to exceptional dedication to student achievement, acting as an advocate and certified tester for students with Dyslexia, ADD & ADHD, Claudia Velez is also a National Board Certified Teacher. Claudia takes an inclusive approach to education, fostering cooperative

learning and teaching the how's and why's in every lesson. Believing that every child has the potential and will to learn, her students thrive year after year. Claudia is a distinctive and exceptional teacher, creating a safe yet challenging learning environment for her students.

**MEGAN GARDNER of Peres Elementary School and DOTTIE HECKMAN of Olinda Elementary School** are wonderful teachers whose commitment to excellence are inspiring to all, receiving Honorable Mention this year.



**DISTINGUISHED**  
**NON-CERTIFICATED**  
**EMPLOYEE AWARD**  
**JAN ETINGOFF, Murphy**  
**Elementary School**

The parents, students and staff at Murphy Elementary know what a gem they have in Jan Etingoff. Jan is more than a yard supervisor, traffic controller, or conflict mediation supervisor - she is in many ways the face of the school. Seen at the crosswalk, library,

PTA meetings and more, Jan often helps at the school for six, eight, even twelve hours a day, volunteering most of her time. Her commitment to the well being of students, teachers, and staff is commendable, her continued efforts admirable.



**DISTINGUISHED**  
**CITIZEN AWARD**  
**MARGARET**  
**MORKOWSKI, Volunteer,**  
**Washington Elementary**  
**School**

Margaret began volunteering to help with just one special needs student, and her relationship with the school and children blossomed into her helping across classrooms with many students. Her efforts extend outside the

classroom into PTA meetings, the Many Hands program, and the community at large. She has helped to purchase books for the school library, opening new worlds for the students she works so hard to support. Gold stars to this kind hearted, generous supporter of our children.

Guests of the Banquet will learn more about these phenomenal award winners, and the difference they have made in the lives of their students. Please join us on May 14th as we honor our 2010 public school heroes.

# The Ed. Fund 2010

## Teaching Excellence Awards

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22nd Annual Excellence in Education Banquet, Friday, May 14, 2010. The Banquet begins at 5:30 p.m. with a cocktail reception and silent auction. Guests will enjoy a delicious dinner at 6:30 p.m. Special guest Ruth Halpern will entertain through storytelling on this year's theme, "Login to Literature." A thrilling live auction and presentation of awards will follow. Guests will be invited to support literacy in West County schools with the Fund-A-Need auction.

In addition to generously supporting the Banquet through sponsorships, Hero sponsor Chevron and Dream Team sponsor Mechanics Bank will give Teaching Excellence Awards that include \$500 for each teacher.

Tickets are available online or by mail. Individuals: \$75 per adult; \$35 for students currently enrolled in WCCUSD. Event and table sponsorships are available. For tickets, event information or to support The Ed. Fund with donations, please visit [www.edfundwest.org](http://www.edfundwest.org); to donate or order tickets by mail, send check to: The Ed. Fund Banquet, 5 Alvarado Square, San Pablo, CA 94806.

With your support, The Ed. Fund will continue to provide essential learning opportunities for West Contra Costa students.