

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

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For Immediate Release

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Tulare County Office of Education Announces:

Countywide *Excellence in Education* Winners Announced

Teacher of the Year, School Employee of the Year and Administrator/Manager of the Year Named

A selection committee of 17 Tulare County business, community and educational leaders met recently to choose the Tulare County Administrator/Manager of the Year, Teacher of the Year and School Employee of the Year for 2006. The *Excellence in Education Awards* recognition program, now celebrating its 12th year, honors "the best of the best" in the three categories. Applications are reviewed and scored individually by every member of the committee. "The common thread that runs through the lives of this year's winners is their willingness to serve their students above and beyond their daily responsibilities. Each of these men and women are deeply committed to the betterment of their respective communities and demonstrate it in very creative ways," says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. The Tulare County Office of Education and County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak are pleased to announce the following *Excellence in Education Award* winners:

Susan Mathews, who teaches Drama and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes at Green Acres Middle School in Visalia, is the **2006 Tulare County Teacher of the**

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Year. For the past 12 years, Susan has directed/produced the Green Acres Little Theatre all-school musicals. In 2004, she established the Green Acres Little Theatre Foundation to support the long-term continuation of theatrical excellence in young people. A classroom teacher for 18 years, Ms. Mathews is described as a “Superstar,” who has dedicated her life to bringing out the very best in all students. She is an active supporter and participant with the Visalia Community Players, Enchanted Playhouse, Fourth Wall Productions, the Barn Theatre in Porterville and the COS annual musical production.

Silvia Thomas, counseling technician at the College of the Sequoias, is the **2006 School Employee of the Year**. A valued employee for 34 years, Silvia provides orientation to new students as part of her many tasks. Because of her fluency in Spanish and Sign Language and a genuine interest when communicating, many seek her out for assistance. The enjoyment Ms. Thomas receives by helping others is not limited to COS. She often travels to Tijuana and Ecuador during spring and summer breaks to assist those in need, and volunteers five nights a week as an announcer on KARM, a local Christian radio station. Silvia began her employment as COS as a student worker. She served as secretary to the Audio Visual Director and was secretary to the vice president of Student Services before accepting her current position as counseling technician.

Manuel Lucero, the assistant principal of Dinuba High School, was selected **Administrator/Manager of the Year**. Manuel inspires others and has increased opportunities for students by expanding the summer school program. Under his leadership, the program has grown from 200

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to over 500 students. Mr. Lucero also coordinates Dinuba High School's Folklorico and Mariachi program and has built a strong network in the Dinuba community.

Working with the local Police Department, Manuel has helped organize parent information nights to better inform parents about gangs and the dangers of drugs. Mr. Lucero's goal is to not only pass on knowledge, but to make the learning experience interactive and memorable.

Finalists

Teacher of the Year

Bertha Avitia, Tulare City Elementary

Douglas Snider, Exeter Union Elementary

Administrator/Manager of the Year

Adam Valencia, Tulare County Office of Education

Janis Lehmann, Tulare Jt. Union High School

School Employee of the Year

Victor Flores, Farmersville Unified

Victoria Johnson, Woodlake Union Elementary

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Summary

“We appreciate the support of our partners in this event – the Educational Employees Credit Union, its President/CEO Bruce Barnett, and board of directors,” says Jim Vidak. “Together, we have been able to celebrate the accomplishments of the talented men and women who devote their lives to educating children and young adults in Tulare County.”

Award recipients and finalists will be honored at a recognition breakfast beginning at 7:30 a.m. on October 4, 2006, at the Visalia Convention Center. For more information, contact Darlynn Billingsley at 733-6302.

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