

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

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Media Alert

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Tulare County Office of Education Announces:

Tulare County *Excellence in Education* Winners Will Be Honored at Breakfast Event October 4, 2006

Teacher of the Year, School Employee of the Year and Administrator/Manager of the Year Winners, Finalists and Nominees Annual Event at Visalia Convention Center

Visalia - The *Excellence in Education Awards* recognition program, now celebrating its 12th year, will honor the winners, finalists and nominees in the three categories: Tulare County Administrator/Manager of the Year, Teacher of the Year and School Employee of the Year, Wednesday morning, October 4, at the Visalia Convention Center. Approximately 400 friends, family members and colleagues are expected to attend the invitation-only event, which begins at 7:30 a.m. in the ballroom. This year, a total of 41 nominees from 20 Tulare County school districts and the College of the Sequoias participated in competition, which was judged in May.

"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

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Office of Education's 2006 *Excellence in Education Award* winners are:

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 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

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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 R. 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 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 Finalists

Bertha Avitia, Tulare City Elementary School District

Douglas Snider, Exeter Union Elementary School District

Administrator/Manager of the Year Finalists

Adam Valencia, Tulare County Office of Education

Janis Lehmann, Tulare Joint Union High School District

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School Employee of the Year Finalists

Victor Flores, Farmersville Unified School District

Victoria Johnson, Woodlake Union Elementary School District

The highlight of the awards event – which is co-hosted by the Educational Employees Credit Union – is a video presentation highlighting the three winners. The film features tributes by colleagues, students and parents, plus interviews with each winner. "The film is a great way to get to know the winners," says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. "It's a touching tribute to the men and women who have dedicated their lives to working with the students of Tulare County."

For more information, contact Darlynn Billingsley at 733-6302.

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