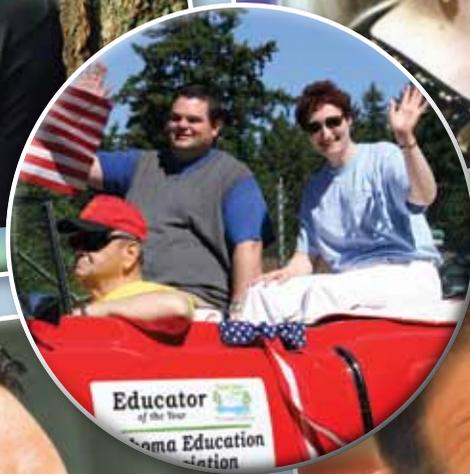


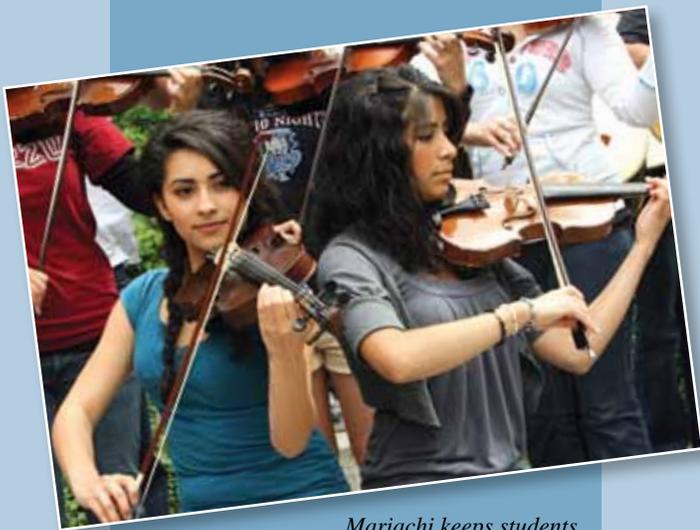
# we2.0

Washington Education Association  
Volume 49, Number 2 – Spring/Summer 2010

# GOOD WORKS



Individually and collectively,  
members are doing great things!



*Mariachi keeps students engaged at Wenatchee High.*

# Thank you

That “village” business is true. Sometimes it’s hard to really know if you are making a difference in your students’ lives.

You are so busy with the day-to-day class activities and assignments, scheduled meetings and prep work you do before, after — and even during — school hours that it’s hard to take a step back. You make sure students’ needs are taken care of — not just academically, but personally.



*Jamie Yoos, Washington’s Teacher of the Year, keeps students engaged with hands-on lesson plans.*

Occasionally, formal recognition is given to a handful. If you’re lucky, you

get personal thank yous, but that’s a tall order when students sometimes don’t realize how much of an impact you’ve had or will have.

We hope you enjoy reading about a few of your colleagues and that you recognize some of your great work within the stories in these pages.

- 2 Mike
- 4 Maribeth
- 6 Ramon
- 9 Tahoma EA
- 10 Jamie

# Carbon Buster

Redmond environmental science teacher Mike Town believes in the power of one.

One teacher.

One student.

One person can make a difference ... even with unimaginably overwhelming issues like global climate change.

And Town has.

As the driving organizer behind the Cool School Challenge, Town is encouraging students at Redmond High School, around the nation and now around the world, to systematically turn off lights, shut down computers, lower thermostats, discard fewer water bottles, and recycle more paper and classroom trash. The payoff is already huge: a reduction of nearly 1.8 million pounds of carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas emissions, and Town is just getting going.

The Cool School Challenge program helps students do energy audits of their schools and then use math and science to calculate ways to reduce their carbon footprint. Town was recognized this spring as the first winner of the NEA Foundation Green Prize in Public Education. The NEA Foundation Green Prize includes a \$25,000 cash stipend. Town said he would use part of the money to expand the solar array on his Duvall home.

“Mike Town was the unanimous choice for the Green Prize because the judges believe, like he does, that big changes do start with small steps ... that an individual, along with his friends and neighbors, can create a difference in this world,” said Harriet Sanford, President and CEO of the NEA Foundation, in presenting the award. “And here is the secret that Mike Town and other educators involved in this work know: Learning about our planet is also a great way to introduce and to teach important concepts about science, math, social studies, history, and a range of things that are important for the 21st Century.”

The award ceremony was emceed by environmental activist Philippe Cousteau, grandson of undersea explorer and filmmaker Jacques Cousteau. Cousteau said he was energized to see the students’ response to Town’s environmental leadership.

“Your generation is more engaged, more dynamic,

more community driven, than any generation for a very, very long time, if ever,” Cousteau said. “That’s the exiting part, that’s the thing that gives me hope when I travel and see the challenges of climate change. ...”

Town noted much of his success is due to the support of other individuals and organizations who share in the desire to reduce climate change, including a supportive district administration and fellow staff, the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, the Department of Ecology, the Sierra Club, Puget Sound Energy, U.S. Rep. Jay Inslee and Gov. Chris Gregoire. Town is now working with the state Superintendent of Public Instruction’s Office to help design a new Environmental Design and Sustainability program to teach about green jobs.

“We develop these programs at Redmond High School, then we take them on the road and teach teachers all across the United States to duplicate the programs in other places,” Town said. “My students have heard me say this before, but first Redmond and then the world. ... I can’t say enough about the governor’s office. Gov. Gregoire, when learning about the Cool School Challenge, took our information and presented it at the International Climate Conference at Copenhagen a couple months ago, and has been a huge supporter.”

Town will have a different platform next year to spread his message: he and his wife Meg plan to move to Washington, D.C., to work for the National Science Foundation under an Einstein Fellowship from the Department of Energy.

“We’re all basking a bit in your glory today,” WEA President Mary Lindquist told Town. “You remind me and other educators why we became teachers in the first place, how our classrooms have relevancy to the larger community, and that a quality education has a lot to do with learning to care about that community.”

Find out more: Learn about the “Cool School Challenge” online at [www.coolschoolchallenge.org](http://www.coolschoolchallenge.org).

Watch a short NEA Foundation video about Mike Town’s program at [www.neafoundation.org/pages/educators/awards/green-prize-in-public-education](http://www.neafoundation.org/pages/educators/awards/green-prize-in-public-education).

*Mike Town, holding the NEA Green Prize in Public Education, surrounded by Cool School Challenge students at Redmond High School. Behind him is Philippe Cousteau, emcee for the April 19 awards ceremony.*





# Mom

*Students and colleagues consider Maribeth Steincipher a formidable equal and friend — in school and on the court.*

**M**aribeth Steincipher has 120 kids. WEA's 2010 Education Support Professional of the Year gave birth to one son, but she considers each of the high school students at the Career Academy at Truman High School in Federal Way her children, and nearly all of them call her mom.



*Student Tyre Ford shares his summer plans with Steincipher during lunch.*

Like so many education support professionals, Steincipher volunteered in her son's elementary school. She had worked for years in "Corporate America," but found she loved working in the public schools when she had to take a break from

her other work to care for her ailing mother. "I attribute my work ethic to the example my mom demonstrated as a single parent of five, who never took a dime of public assistance money and never received regular child support," Steincipher says. "She was a hero to me." Steincipher, it turns out, is a hero to her kids as well. She and her husband took in seven children along the way who were not in the foster care system, but who needed a nurturing home where they could be free from some of the struggles of their previous homes and be given the chance to concentrate on schoolwork. "I was blessed with a wonderful, loving, big-hearted son who never gave me a moment of grief," Steincipher says. "That allowed me the time and love to give to other children in need." Steincipher's title at the alternative high school where she works was registrar/data specialist. She has recently moved into an office manager position. She managed the health room at the school four days a week as well because, as we all know, it is difficult for students to schedule their becoming

sick on the one day the nurse is there. Her title, however, does not begin to describe some of her “other duties” that she has volunteered to take on over the years.

Steincipher took students to Namibia in Africa to deliver 85 computers through a Rotary Club project called Computers for the World. She supervises students on overnight field trips and evening events or volunteer projects. She has served as dance team advisor and hosted numerous late-night “study clubs.” She started a lunchtime walking club called, “Just for the Health of It,” which modeled healthy behavior for staff as well as students.

“I made more money in the corporate world, but I don’t know that I made a difference,” she says. “The students at Truman have given me a purpose in life and have made me feel like I have made a difference in their lives.”

School psychologist Tanya McLeod says Steincipher functions as a surrogate mother to many students by initiating conversations about attendance, problems with peers, homework or health.

“She is always positive and gives solid, good advice and, most important, encouragement,” McLeod says. “For students with anxiety, she installed a dim lamp and soft music.”

Steincipher was instrumental in creating a prom environment where every student is encouraged to attend — and they do. She often buys decorations with her own money, designs the displays, helps those who need prom clothes find them and warmly welcomes the students on the special night. The students say that Steincipher is the glue that holds the school together and her colleagues agree.

“If you ask any student who they could go to in our school to celebrate a success or get some good advice during a difficult time — they would all say Maribeth,” co-worker Charissa Eggleston says. “If she doesn’t know the answer to their dilemma, she is a role model for them on how to advocate for themselves and seek a solution.”

Steincipher says her empathy comes straight from her own experience. She said she made some difficult choices when

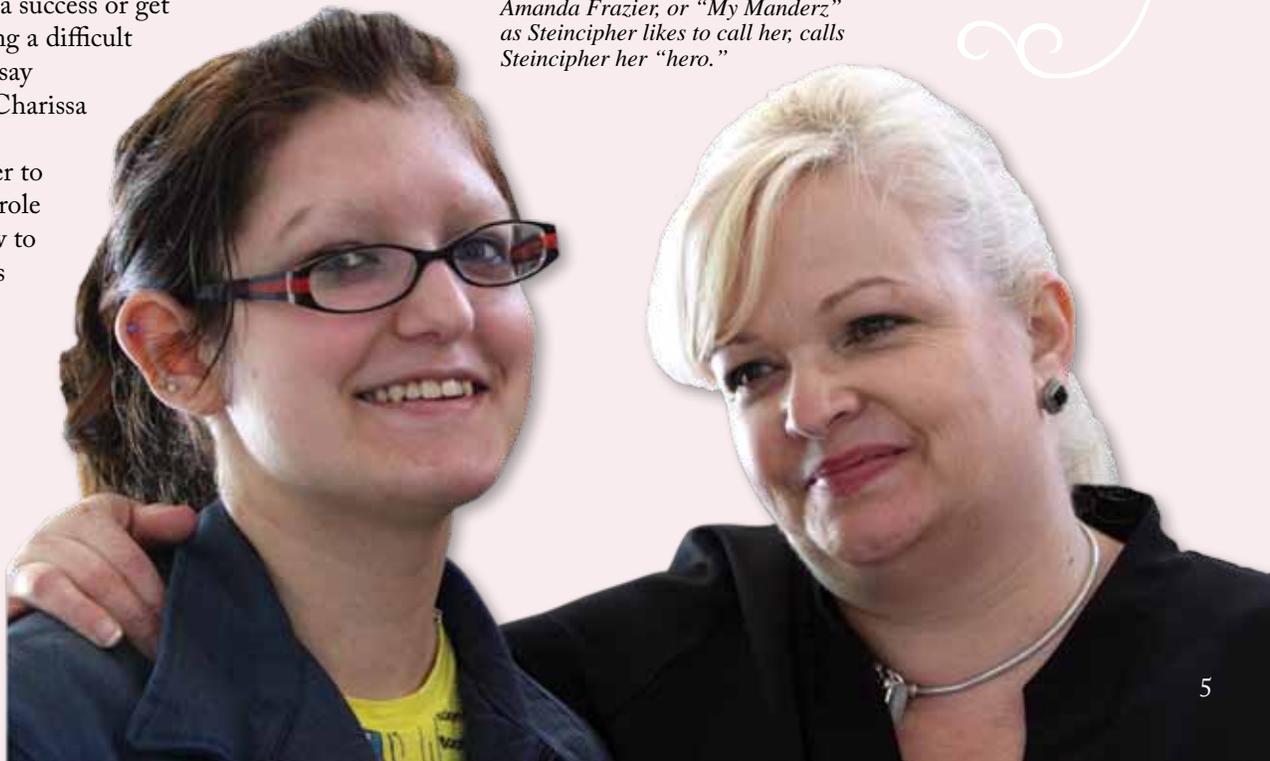
she was a teenager and she is able to communicate with students that even if they make some bad choices, they can always turn it around and start making better ones. The students say she loves them equally and they appreciate the way she doesn’t judge their actions. She gives them a clean slate and an encouraging word every day.

Everyone around her says she is extremely professional with the confidential information and other issues she encounters. McLeod says she is in awe of how much Steincipher handles each day. With all of her other duties, Steincipher says she believes her top priority as a support staff is just that — to support teachers and administrators. She bristles when she thinks about office staff members who chide teachers for not planning better to get something prepared.

“If a teacher comes in and needs something, my job is to do whatever I have to do to get their needs met,” she says.

One student shares a story about Steincipher coming to pick him up and take him to his home when he was stuck without transportation. He nearly tears up when he talks about her deep commitment to the students. Another student shares examples of how Steincipher tells her to take responsibility for her actions and always be honest. Still, another, looks forward to lunchtime ping pong or basketball time with Steincipher. Maribeth Steincipher’s support work at the Career Academy is immeasurable. The countless things she does to help everyone through the day can only be compared to what a mother would do for her own children. And, perhaps, that is only one of the many reasons the students call her mom.

*Amanda Frazier, or “My Manderz” as Steincipher likes to call her, calls Steincipher her “hero.”*



# Getting in tune with mariachi music

Just a mile from downtown Wenatchee, 90 students gather daily to create and hone the music of the majority of their elders' homeland.

They get numerous invitations to play in community events, games and grand openings. They pick up awards, Spanish, and along the way, lessons that mariachi teacher Ramon Rivera hopes will sustain his students for life.

With high dropout rates among Hispanic and Latino students, connecting students to school by way of music is one way to keep the district's largest ethnic group academically engaged.

"Our class is like a family for these kids," says Rivera, Wenatchee High School's mariachi teacher and music department chairman. "What this program brings to our students is cultural pride, school pride and pride in themselves, and this really connects the kids to schools."

Mariachi is a centuries-old musical tradition that hails from the Mexican state of Jalisco and the surrounding region. In Wenatchee and cities

wherever there is an influx of Mexican immigrants, mariachi is an alternative to traditional band, orchestra or choir for students. Ensembles typically include a couple of trumpets, a guitar, violins and ethnic instruments: the five-stringed

vihuelas, which resemble little guitars (pronounced vee-way-las) and guitarrons, the big-bellied bass.

In Wenatchee, the mariachi program has blossomed in popularity and size to include 300 students districtwide. Every year high school students audition to be part of one of the three coveted groups, including the elite Mariachi Huenachi. Mariachi also is offered at two elementary and three middle schools.

Mariachi not only gave Miguel Zuniga closer ties with his family, it gave the Wenatchee High School senior one more reason to stay in school.

"I've learned a lot," Zuniga says. "This class gives you more experiences to go out and see places I've never been to."

Rivera says the music is more than just entertainment for students because it teaches commitment and discipline and sets students on the right path. He tries to have a no-F policy, and there is an expectation that students do well in all of their classes.



Through work with Gear Up and migrant education programs, students are exposed to colleges and scholarships and help they normally wouldn't seek. Students are paired with tutors and mentors, if needed, so they can succeed in school.

"I tell them every day is audition," Rivera says. "I'm going to look at your attitude, how hard you work —because if you don't hang, there are others who want that spot."

"It's good that they are good musicians, but we want them to become leaders in the community, and that's what this program has done for a lot of these students."

Part of Wenatchee's success, says Rivera, is because of the district's steadfast support of music for every student who wants to learn and play. Mariachi is in addition to another 10 strong music offerings. Rivera says he's fortunate but also knows it's not the same elsewhere, given the deep budgetary cuts every district is facing.

"I believe if you give a kid a violin; if you give a kid a guitar; if you give a kid a trumpet, they won't join a gang. They won't pick up the knife; they won't pick up the gun and they won't do something negative," he says.

"I would imagine if we didn't have this program at Wenatchee High School, a lot of kids would not



make it to receive their diplomas and that's what keeps me going all the time."

Aside from encouraging Hispanic students, mariachi is bringing parents into schools who might have been too intimidated to visit before. School concerts and community events are often packed with parents, grandparents and relatives who know all the old songs and are often heard singing along. The music becomes a kind of "cultural glue" in some cases, because students are seeking advice on proper pronunciation of Spanish songs.

"I didn't know how to play an instrument before," tenth-grader Itza Luquin says. "I started on guitar then switched to vihuela. It makes me feel good to play in Mariachi Huenachi and I enjoy being around them (my classmates)."

Senior Eddie Cortes says each serenade teaches



Mariachi teacher Ramon Rivera: "I believe if you give kids music, or art, or sports, they will finish school."

him the value of his culture, history and language.

“Orchestra is fun but mariachi is part of my culture,” he says. “I’ve learned the different styles of mariachi. It’s fun to play.”

Twice each month, Rivera takes Mariachi Huenachi on the road, performing at Washington State, Eastern and Central Washington universities and various special events including the Folklife Festival in Seattle and before Gov. Chris Gregoire. The outings are as much about performing as well as building confidence and pride.

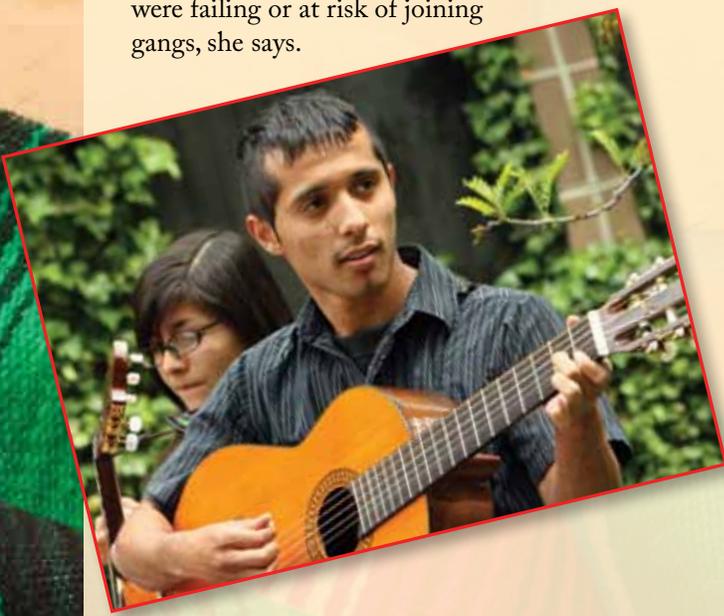
“I always add a tour of the campus and meeting the director of admissions, or meeting a vice president or meeting a dean because what that does is it’s making a connection,” Rivera says. “A lot of the families won’t get in the car and go visit the University of Washington. They don’t have the time or the resources.

“Some of them have never been to a hotel and have never stayed overnight,” Rivera says. “A lot of parents work in agriculture, and they have 10 people living in one apartment, and we wonder why they don’t succeed when they have poverty like this working against them. What I tell them is education is the key to getting out of poverty. The best way to help your family is to get an education.”

For senior Maria Cortes, a performance at Washington State University helped her find her future college.

“I don’t play sports so I thought I should do something,” the WSU-bound Cortes says. “I like the opportunity it gives us.”

The contributions Rivera has made extend far beyond the musical abilities he patiently passes on to the students, senior Laurie Bazán says. The mariachi program has turned around the lives of kids who were once disruptive in class, who were failing or at risk of joining gangs, she says.



*Members of Wenatchee High School’s elite Mariachi Huenachi run through a medley of serenades and upbeat classics. Students audition to be part of the 20-member group and travel and perform twice a month throughout the state. Students say their music class teaches them about discipline, hardwork — and fun.*

“Being in Mariachi Huenachi, I’ve traveled to a lot of universities that maybe I wouldn’t have had the chance to visit if it hadn’t been for the mariachi program,” says Bazán, who will attend the University of Washington this fall on a full scholarship as a Gates Millennium Scholar.

“Yes, it is about the music and we do learn about our music and our culture, but it’s also about being the first in the family to go to college,” Bazán says. “Mr. Rivera has moved mountains just so students can get into universities (and) get transcripts ready. He knows the importance of education and I think he really knows what students go through in a low-income home, in a migrant home — and I think that’s what helps him so much, being able to connect to the students.”

Spontaneous jam sessions often pick up when class officially ends. Students huddle around to play and sing along to tunes coming from someone’s iPod.

“What keeps me going is these guys are accomplishing something bigger than music,” Rivera says, before joining in with his trumpet. “They are going to universities. They’re going to schools. They’re becoming leaders.”



*Tahoma's union, TEA, has been honored as "Teacher of the Year" and members led a June 12 community parade in Maple Valley. TEA President Scott Mitchell and Treasurer Martina Morgan are in the red car.*

## Honor: TEA is Maple Valley's Educator of the Year

In an unusual gesture of collaboration, the Tahoma School District has named its teachers union, the Tahoma Education Association, as the Maple Valley Educator of the Year. The honor — usually for a single teacher — comes as part of the community's Maple Valley Days, a local celebration held each June with music, carnival rides and a town parade.

As the district noted in its announcement of the TEA selection, "This year will be different."

"Instead of honoring one individual teacher," the announcement said, "Superintendent Mike Maryanski has submitted the names of all teachers, as represented by TEA, to recognize the contributions they make each day in the classroom and to acknowledge their support of the school district through volunteer service and donations to the Voice of Tahoma Education Committee in the February levy election campaign.

"At a time when state education funding is being reduced and our district has had to adjust its spending, Tahoma's

teachers and support staff continue to perform at the highest level to deliver quality learning to our students. That deserves community recognition."

Tahoma is a rural suburban district located in Maple Valley, about 10 miles southeast of Renton. TEA represents the district's 400 certificated staff.

"This is not something we usually see happen, but we're really happy about the relationship that we have with the school district and the collaborative efforts we can make," TEA President Scott Mitchell said.

"Tahoma is one of those places where we sit down and we problem solve ... We just work together to come to solutions that we can both agree on, and to make this a better place to teach and learn."

TEA members expressed their appreciation for the honor as well, Mitchell said.

"Lots of e-mails (after the announcement) said, 'This is great — it's nice to work in a community where we are appreciated by our district.'"



*“If I could change one thing in public education, it would be the recognition that students are needing multiple modalities in order to truly understand concepts,” says Jamie Yoos, Washington’s 2010 Teacher of the Year. Yoos provides hands-on lessons for all of his students — in his advanced chemistry and bicycle maintenance classes.*

# Whiz bang ... and more



*Students say they appreciate how Yoos is an active learner alongside them.*

“It’s not like he’s a flashy teacher but you learn so much it’s insane,” Bellingham High School student Ruth Tag says about this year’s Washington Teacher of the Year Jamie Yoos.

Yoos, who teaches Honors Chemistry, AP Chemistry and a bicycle maintenance course at Bellingham, says his main goal is to increase experiential learning so individuals who are more kinesthetically inclined can benefit and stay engaged in school.

“I remember the line to get into

his class for Honors Chemistry last year was huge and I had to push my way through with my counselor. He is the best chemistry teacher,” AP Chemistry student Michelle Thomas says. “He’s definitely brilliant in his profession and just so innovative, so we have great labs in class.”

Yoos produces video podcasts or “vodcasts” for students to view at home so they can maximize lab time in class. He says he likes the idea that students can access the vodcasts anytime. “They can go at midnight and check out a concept again



*“The curriculum is important; the idea I’m seeking to get across, of course, is important, but really I try to set up an environment where the students are comfortable and they can make that step into the realm of the unknown,” Yoos says.*

and they can move through at their own pace,” Yoos says.

Yoos said he decided to pursue a teaching career when he was working as a teaching assistant in an outdoor education center in Texas. He knew he wanted to teach, but he wanted to spend more time gaining practical experience so he worked for a small biotech company outside of Seattle as a bench chemist before returning to school to obtain his master’s degree.

What amazes and energizes him is the process of discovery that happens when a student is in the learning cycle.

“That element is more powerful for me than any sort of economic incentive,” he says. “I try to set up an environment where the students are comfortable. When they are comfortable, they can make that step into the realm of the unknown.”

Yoos says he is most concerned that kinesthetic classes from public schools are becoming more and more rare. He worries that there is too much emphasis on lecture-based materials. He often has his students perform experiments in lab, he says, that allow them to understand very complex chemical processes.

“I think one of the key elements to getting a student involved,” he says, “is by showing engaging activities and allowing them to participate. If students are interested in what’s happening, they’re willing to ask questions that lead them to levels of higher understanding.”

“He’s got great energy and connects with students really well,” AP Chemistry student Ben Kunesh says.

“The material I’d covered before in science just didn’t seem that important or that interesting, but once I had Mr. Yoos, I fell in love with the subject and couldn’t pass up taking AP Chemistry,” says senior Gordon Friedman. “I would definitely pursue science in college because now I find it really interesting.”

Yoos says he is very proud of the bicycle maintenance course he teaches. He feels very strongly that computer-based classes are not the same as classes where students get hands-on experience. He raised all the money necessary to get the elective course going.

As Washington teacher of the year, Yoos is serving as an ambassador for the teaching profession while maintaining his duties at Bellingham High School.



**Governance and Administration:**  
Mary Lindquist, WEA President  
Mike Ragan, WEA Vice President  
John Okamoto, WEA Executive Director

**WEA Communications Staff:** Dale Folkerts, Brooke Mattox, David Phelps, Dottie Watson, Eddie Westerman, Linda Woo and Rich Wood

We are interested in your feedback and ideas. Reach Editor Linda Woo at [lwoo@washingtonea.org](mailto:lwoo@washingtonea.org), by mail at P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA 98063-9100, or 253-765-7027.

*We 2.0* (ISSN 1544-5283) is published quarterly by the Washington Education Association, 32032 Weyerhaeuser Way S., Federal Way, WA 98001-9687. Subscription cost of \$1.46 is included in annual membership dues. Separate subscription price: \$15.50 annually.

Copyright 2010 by the Washington Education Association.

Periodical nonprofit postage paid at Auburn, WA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *We 2.0*, P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA 98063-9100.

# A Teacher to Remember

Nearly 1,200 students in grades 3-12 submitted essays in WEA's annual "A Teacher to Remember" essay contest. Some wrote about the impact you had on their learning; others wrote about the quirks and smiles you bring to school each day. One thing all of the essays reflected was your passion for why you work in public education. Here's one of this year's winning essays, a piece by Lauren Peterson, a fifth-grader at Edmonds Elementary School, about her former teacher Christy Diefendorf. Please visit [www.WashingtonEA.org/awards](http://www.WashingtonEA.org/awards) to read the other winning essays. Congratulations to all.



## A TEACHER TO REMEMBER

*Lauren Peterson  
Edmonds Elementary*

When she was a teenager, Mrs. Diefendorf taught a younger girl to knit. Someone, who was watching, told Mrs. Diefendorf she should become a teacher because she was so patient with the younger girl. She did become a teacher, a National Board Certified Teacher. She has been patient and kind to me too.

Mrs. D was my first and fourth grade teacher. In second grade I was struggling with reading. My mom called Mrs. Diefendorf for help. She tutored me after school to help me get caught up. She also helped my older brothers, even my high-school-aged brother, with school work. Now I am in fifth grade, but I still can ask her for help with school work or any problem I have.

Mrs. Diefendorf's classroom is great for learning. You have fun and learn at the same time. She keeps everyone under control, but is never mean. All her students know she cares about them. She is fair. Every year she has a student teacher in her classroom. They will learn to be good teachers because they are in her class and learn from her.

Mrs. Diefendorf and I both love to do craft projects. Mrs. Diefendorf's favorite hobby is quilting. She taught an after-school quilt club where I learned about making quilts. We made a square that could be turned into a pillow or a wall hanging. When Mrs. Diefendorf saw how interested I was in quilting, she helped me make a quilt for my bed. She showed my mom and me how to get started and then she helped me sew it together. We showed it to the ladies at the quilt shop. They were impressed!

I know I will always remember Mrs. Diefendorf unless I get Alzheimer's like my grandpa. She is a teacher to remember.

*Student: Lauren Peterson  
Current grade: 5  
Student's school: Edmonds Elementary  
Teacher honored: Christy Diefendorf  
Teacher's school: Edmonds Elementary*