

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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SVHS teacher Johns wins KENS5 ExCEL Award

The one thing Comal ISD KENS5 ExCEL Award winner Stephanie Johns knew for certain when she was growing up in Colorado was that she would one day become a teacher.

With a mother, Jean, who taught school and at the same time worked toward her master's degree as a role model, it's no wonder the kind of games Johns would play as a child.

"Our garage made the perfect classroom," said Johns, a German teacher at Smithson Valley High. "I had just enough chairs to put into a row and a makeshift chalkboard. I really never, ever considered any other career. I felt that teaching was my destiny."

Johns, who received a Golden Apple award from KENS5 and a \$1000 check from San Antonio Federal Credit Union during a ceremony on Nov. 18 at SVHS, said observing her mother gave her plenty of inspiration.

"The level of commitment my mother put into her work was obvious," Johns said. "What affected me the most was the commitment she had to her students. She truly cared about them. I wanted to be just like her."

Years later, when Johns received her bachelor's degree from the University of Northern Colorado with a major in German and a minor in English, and a teaching certificate from the University of Kansas, she was well on her way to fulfilling her dream.

“The only question left was, what to teach?,” Johns said. “Along my educational path, words had become my passion – learning them, speaking them, reading them, writing them, and ultimately, teaching them. Teaching German was my first choice, but there always seemed to be a need for Language Arts teachers at the middle school level, so that’s where I found myself.”

Beginning in 1986, and for the next 20 years, Johns taught middle school English and reading, first in McAllen, before stops in San Antonio, Spring, and another in San Antonio.

“I grew to love teaching reading and writing,” Johns said. “I loved focusing my energy there every day. The things that made me proudest were the many, ‘Thanks for making me read!’” notes I would receive during the school year.”

Johns proudly recalled a certain classroom project that, before it was finished, had an entire town taking action.

“I wanted to show our students that reading the newspaper wasn’t only about reading the news, but also expressing your views to the community,” Johns said. “My students didn’t believe they had anything to write that anyone in the community would be interested in. I helped them brainstorm a list of things that they would like to have changed in the city of McAllen, especially in their own neighborhoods.”

Not only were people interested when the letters to the editor were published in the newspaper, but it caused a community outcry when the public learned some children were living in areas with broken street lights, near overgrown lots full of snakes and rats, and with cars speeding in dangerous proximity to their houses.

“Within two weeks, the city council acted,” Johns said. “They sent three representatives to our school to talk with the children so action could be taken. Soon, my students watched in awe as the problems they voiced were corrected.

“The empowerment felt by those students shone brightly on their faces. That was the ultimate ‘teachable moment.’”

In the last three years, Johns has come full circle.

When a German teaching position at Smithson Valley High School opened up, Johns jumped at the opportunity.

“I knew my original goal could be attained,” said Johns, who accepted an SVHS German teaching job in 2006. “I’ve always loved teaching, but the last three years have made it even more exciting. Teaching German is the icing on the cake.”

SVHS principal Chris Trotter said Johns has certainly been a welcome member of his school’s staff.

“Stephanie brings an energy our kids are drawn to,” Trotter said. “She’s an excellent teacher. Everybody here loves her.”

Johns is a sponsor of the school’s German club, and has taken students to Germany each of the past two summers. She also is a new teacher mentor, and is mentoring someone this school year that’s earning her certificate to become a French teacher.

Johns said all these years later, she still couldn’t picture herself as anything other than a teacher.

“I don’t think I could have picked a career that would have been more rewarding,” Johns said. “There has never been a time when I regretted becoming a teacher.”

A tribute to Johns, filmed in her classroom and during the award ceremony at SVHS, will air during the 6 p.m., KENS5 Eyewitness News, on Nov. 20, and again between 7:30-9 a.m., on Nov. 22. A photo of her and other district ExCEL Award winners will appear in San Antonio Federal Credit Unions across the city.

The Comal ISD would like to congratulate its other nominees for the ExCEL Award this year. This school year, nominees were all from secondary schools. They were Canyon Lake High’s Sharon Monzingo, Canyon High’s Karen Warren, Smithson Valley Middle’s Cynthia Pike, Church Hill Middle’s Nicole Morris, Mountain Valley Middle’s Elizabeth Douglas, Canyon Middle’s Tara Goetz, and Spring Branch Middle’s Lori Schulte Lehmburg.