

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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SVMS teacher Cooper named SACU KENS5 Golden Apple Award Winner

Smithson Valley Middle School teacher Bart Cooper was honored as Comal ISD's KENS5 San Antonio Credit Union ExCEL Award winner in a ceremony at SVMS on Oct. 26.

He received the Golden Apple Award from KENS5 and a check for \$1,000 from SACU.



KENS5 will run a story featuring Cooper during its 6 p.m. newscast on Oct. 28. It will re-air during the station's Oct. 30 newscast between 7:30-9 a.m.

"This award is really about my students," Cooper said. "They are the reason I love coming to school every day and the reason I love my job."

Cooper's journey down the path that ultimately led him to becoming an educator was anything but typical.

He was first a member of the U.S. Marine Corps, a design engineer and a self-described "Mr. Mom."

After spending four years as an active Marine, Cooper decided to go to college and received his degree from the University of North Texas in manufacturing engineering.

Upon graduation, Cooper didn't have his sights set anywhere near a classroom as he took a job in the defense industry, working first at Texas Instruments and then at Raytheon.

"I was aware I built weapons and weapons systems which would be used to defend our military but would also cost the lives of people in military conflict with the United States," Cooper said. "While I'm a proud Marine and also consider it an honor to have helped protect our military as a civilian, I also knew I would have to balance the scales of humanity."

Cooper didn't know at the time it was the love of a woman and her two little girls what would eventually lead him to teaching.

"I fell head over heels for Katie and her daughters," said Cooper, who would eventually adopt Amanda and Lauren. "I asked Katie and her daughters to marry me, and they accepted."

Katie was living in Comal County, but Cooper and his new family would soon have to make the decision that would shape the rest of his life.

He received a lucrative offer in the defense industry, but would have to relocate to Tucson, Ariz. After a trip out west, it didn't take Bart and Katie long to decide Comal County is where they wanted to be.

"This was a difficult decision because both of us had jobs with good companies, and Katie really loved Comal County and the school the girls were attending," Cooper said. "In a year's time I had gone from being a bachelor with a good income to a husband and father of two girls. I was also now looking for a job. We would also soon welcome in another daughter, Reilly, into our lives as we learned Katie was pregnant."

Cooper's mother-in-law Nancy Riley happened to work in the front office at Mountain Valley School, where his daughters attended. Cooper volunteered there regularly, and after principal Sarah Towler noticed how well he worked with the students, she asked if he would like to help out in the school's behavior resource center.

Cooper was accepted into the Region 13 Certification program and became a certified special education teacher.

"I was hooked," said Cooper, who also picked up general education certifications in math and science. "I loved working with these kids. While it could be extremely difficult at times, the rewards were incredible. I loved my job. Seeing the look on a student's face when they learn to read or begin to understand math is indescribable. Seeing a student change their opinion of

school from being a place of fear to a place of comfort and safety came close to bringing this former marine to tears on more than one occasion.”

After six years of teaching in the behavior resource center, Cooper accepted the position as a seventh grade science teacher at Smithson Valley Middle School in 2007.

“It was a whole new challenge,” Cooper said. “I knew that any one of these students could go on to finding the cure for a devastating disease or discover something that would change all of our lives. Each of them has the ability to change the world and humanity for the betterment of all.”

Smithson Valley Middle principal Michael Keranen said Cooper certainly understands what teaching is all about.

“Bart is one of the most dynamic and energetic teachers I’ve seen,” Keranen said. “He gets his kids involved and makes learning fun and engaging. We are very lucky to have him on our campus.”

Other Comal ISD secondary-level teachers nominated for the KENS5 San Antonio Credit Union ExCEL Award were Keith Cunningham (Alamo Colleges-Memorial Early College High), Catherine Deatherage (Canyon High), Suzanne Schule (Canyon Lake High), Cindy Boyce (Smithson Valley High), Alejandro Matos (Comal Discipline Center), Jennifer Cooper (Canyon Middle), Stephanie Quinn (Church Hill Middle), Robin Reed (Spring Branch Middle) and Maria Felch (Mountain Valley Middle).

Next year’s Comal ISD winner will be selected from the elementary level.

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IN PHOTO: Smithson Valley Middle teacher Bart Cooper gladly accepts the Golden Apple Award from KENS5’s Wendy Rigby as SVMS student Miranda Ashley looks on. Cooper also received a \$1,000 check from the San Antonio Credit Union for being named Comal ISD’s ExCEL Award winner.