

# Lamorinda Teachers Make the Grade

Three Nominated for County Teacher of the Year

By Cathy Dausman



Terry Miller, Los Perales



Photos Cathy Dausman Kim Burris, Orinda School District



Mette Thallaug, Burton Valley Elementary Reading Specialist

Three Lamorinda teachers with more than 60 years of combined classroom experience were named semifinalists of the Contra Costa County Office of Education's Teacher of the Year award. They are Mette Thallaug, Lafayette's Burton Valley Elementary, Terry Miller, Los Perales Elementary in Moraga, and Kim Burris, Orinda Unified School District. The remaining teachers represent Martinez and San Ramon Valley school districts.

Three of these five teachers will be selected as finalists; the top finalist will be named County Representative in September, and will compete for the title of California Teacher of the Year. Finding a favorite among the three Lamorinda teachers, however, is like asking someone to choose just one ice cream flavor or name a favorite aunt; it's not that easy.

Each teacher submitted six application essays and was observed in the classroom by a team of four: two

teachers and two business partners. Beyond the paperwork and classroom and students, and a sincere appreciation for administrative and parental support.

Reading Specialist Mette Thallaug has spent 22 years in education, and 20 years in the Lafayette School District. She spent the last six years at Burton Valley, and views technology as a boon to young readers' skills.

Thallaug admitted the application process was "a lot of work," but that it also allowed for plenty of self-reflection. She said her kindergarten students were more distracted by the classroom visitors than she was during her observation time—teachers get used to that, she said. Thallaug knows there are "many" good teachers, and that the program seeks to find someone who will be a good spokesperson for education.

Terry Miller has taught for 21 years. She began her career in Stockton, and then moved to the Moraga school district 15 years ago. She's been at Los Perales the entire time, and is earning a master's degree in the Teacher Leadership program at Saint Mary's College. Miller previously taught first grade and now teaches kindergarten. She has her students to think of their classmates as "kinder friends" and speaks warmly about her Bear Cub (class mascot) school family. She loves to team teach with small groups and finds she is constantly refining curriculum. Miller's former first-grade students may know her as "Ms. Jones."

Kim Burris is a Literacy Coach for all five Orinda schools and has

taught "only in Orinda" for 19 years. She began by job-sharing a third-grade teaching position that lasted 13 years, and allowed her to experience what she called "the best of every world."

Orinda had multiple literacy coaches for various grade levels when Burris first started working; she is now their only literacy coach. She revels in the opportunity she has to teach, observe and meet with students and parents, and said her job is "never the same every year." And she quickly credited everyone else involved in teaching. "I am only who I am because of a fabulous team," she said.

The California Teacher of the Year program began in 1972 and is open to pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers in public and private schools. Contra Costa County's public schools alone employ nearly 8,000 teachers to educate 169,000 students. The first year's county winner was Joseph Davis, Jr. from the Acalanes Union High School District. Since then, four other teachers from Contra Costa County have been named state finalists.

**New Campolindo Principal**  
In other Lamorinda education news, the Acalanes Union High School District Governing Board approved the appointment of John Walker as Campolindo High School principal effective July 1. Walker was assistant principal at San Ramon Valley High School; he also taught at St. Mary's College High School in Berkeley. He replaces the retiring Carol Kitchens. A special welcome/reception is planned May 10 from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. at the Campolindo library.

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## TEEN SCENE

### Consider This: It's all in the Past

By Steven Zhou

As we inch closer to the beginning of summer, whether you're a seventh-grader or a senior in high school, we look back and reminisce about another school year come and gone. For some, the memories of the past are filled with joyful experiences, while for others, there's the taint of regret. Our experiences are history and, good or bad, they shape the people that we are today. Sydney Liu, a junior at Campolindo, recognizes the influence of her past on her present: "I find that during the moment, I can feel proud, confused, hurt, or regretful, but now, years later, I look back without regrets. My past created my personality."

Whether experiences have been positive or negative, the key is to learn from everything and move on. The former CEO of Yahoo, Carol Bartz held a mantra of "fail fast forward." This mentality is one we can all consider as we furiously travel through our teenage years towards college and adulthood. We may have experienced unparalleled success in scholastic ventures and extracurricular activities yet also suffered devastating disappointment in other areas. A good friend of mine was rejected from the one college he had dreamed of attending throughout his high school career. However, the setback actually guided him to a university he now loves even more. Looking back at the experience, one can truly appreciate the effect that our past has on molding our decisions, feelings, and thoughts in the present day.

Heidi Homma, a senior at Miramonte, looks at her own memories with satisfaction, saying that "due to taking risks and coming out of my comfort zone, sometimes I felt remorse, but they were all learning experiences that will remain in my memories always." We grow and learn by involvement;

without both the pleasure and the pain, we can never understand what it means to cherish every moment of life.

Lamorinda youth are invited to share how their school experiences have shaped them on Saturday, May 12 at the Moraga Community Faire as Express Yourself Teen Radio hosts live recordings. This is a free opportunity for community teens to express to global listeners what the end of school or graduation means to them. For example, the current seniors on our Star Teen Radio team are feeling the aches of time flying by too quickly. We have been producing the show, now number one on the network, for over six months, yet it feels like yesterday when we were figuring out the basics of operating Skype, struggling through the bumps of human and technological challenges.

I readily admit that the nostalgia of the past few years has bitten me, especially as I prepare myself for graduation next month. The memories of fifth grade, middle school, and each of my high school years will continue to define my individuality and the way I make choices in the future.

Consider this. The wins, losses, triumphs, disappointments, laughter, and tears of school elections, games, awards, applications, relationships, etc., may all be in the past, but without them, there is no present.

Miramonte senior Steven Zhou is the administrator and host for the #1 YA global radio program, ExpressYourself! He has received a scholarship to attend Pepperdine University this fall.

Teen Scene is YOUR voice. If you have something to say or have writing skills and want to be part of our Teen Scene team, email our Teen Coach, Cynthia Brian, Cynthia@CynthiaBrian.com.

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