

Learning Ancient history in class has never been this much fun

By Marianne Ratcliff
Santa Paula Times

This is Ancient Civilizations for the history books. Isbell Middle School sixth-grade teacher Jennifer Dobbie received a \$500 scholarship at an awards ceremony Wednesday evening in Oxnard for her innovations in the classrooms.



Jennifer Dobbie

Her students collaborated in teams that then competed in creating multilevel, multi-player video games based on the ancient Hebrews. Students had to research gaming and how people in gaming companies submit their proposals to the gaming companies using software called Storyboard That. They work together on Google Docs recreating the destruction of the temple and giving special powers to historical figures.

Dobbie casts herself as the game developer executive and picks finalists who then add new levels to their games. “The winners get a pizza party, instead of a job,” she quipped.

“I am trying to meet the students where they are,” she said. “When in Rome... I am jumping in with both feet. The thing about being innovative is not being afraid and being willing to fail.”

The veteran teacher of 21 years has been teaching in Santa Paula for 12 years. “I absolutely love my students,”

she said. “They are so great and have so much potential. Santa Paula is a gem. I adore my colleagues. We work together as a team.”

This is not the first or last of Dobbie’s innovative teaching plans, since they are cataloged on the Ventura County Office of Education website by year, and this is her 11th listed project, which can be viewed online at www.vcoe.org.

Dobbie invites the community to see another one of her fun projects at Greek Family Night on May 29 at 6 p.m. in the Isbell Middle School cafeteria. “It is so amazing,” she said. “The kids work so hard on their projects.

Dobbie’s grant is sponsored by SAGE Corwin Publishing, headquartered in Thousand Oaks.

Teachers from throughout Ventura County are being honored with grants for developing innovative lessons for their students. At the ceremony, the Ventura County Office of Education presented 14 IMPACT II grants to 23 teachers from nine schools in seven local districts.

The grants are funded by local businesses and organizations that wish to promote unique and creative teaching practices.

The winners were selected by judging teams composed of educators and community members.

The winning entries cover a variety of subject matters, including the environment, civics and psychology.

Detailed lesson plans prepared by each of the grant winners will soon be posted online at <https://www.vcoe.org/Impactii> for use by other teachers in Ventura County and beyond.

Other grant recipients were from Anacapa Middle School, Pacific High School,

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— Jennifer Dobbie

Camarillo Academy of Progressive Education, Colina Middle School, Monte Vista Middle School, Ventura Charter School, Blackstock Jr. High, Thousand Oaks High

IMPACT II is a curriculum-sharing and recognition program for educators in kindergarten through grade 12 in all subject areas. Since 1993, Ventura County educators have received \$388,500 in sponsor-funded grants.

Educators submit grant proposals about classroom-tested curricula they have developed. A committee of educators, school administrators and business partners select the most unique, innovative and ready-to-share ideas to receive the sponsored grants.

The Ventura County Office of Education provides a broad array of fiscal, training and technology support services to local school districts, helping to maintain and improve lifelong educational opportunities for children, educators and community members. VCOE also operates schools that serve students with severe disabilities and behavioral issues, provides career education courses, and coordinates countywide academic competitions including Mock Trial and the Ventura County Science Fair. Learn more at: www.vcoe.org.



Photo by Dan Diaz

Ventura County Teacher of the Year Jan-Erik Sand, stands with his father, Dr. Jon Sand, also an educator. He is holding a book, “The Key to Read,” written by his grandmother, a second-grade teacher and illustrated by his aunt. He said he keeps the book close by as inspiration.

Teacher of the Year, Continued from Page 1

played overseas in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Sand draws on his military experience to help support teachers who are new to the field. “Teaching, like serving in the military, can no doubt be quite challenging at times,” he said. “When I mentor junior teachers, I often find myself referencing a favorite poster on my classroom wall by multimillionaire Art Williams. It reads, ‘I’m not telling you it’s easy — I’m telling you it’s going to be worth it.’”

Teacher of the Year candidates are nominated by their district, school or professional organization and a panel of educators selects the winner based on the candidate’s essay, experience and an introductory letter from a sponsor.

Started in 1973, this award is in its 46th year and this is the first time a Santa Paula middle-school teacher has been named Ventura County Teacher of the Year.

Dignitaries on hand to honor Sand included Stan Mantooth, Ventura County superintendent of schools; Antonio Castro, Ventura County Office of Education associate superintendent for Educational Services; Ed Cora, Santa Paula Unified School District superintendent; Ron Briggs, Isbell Middle School principal; Christine Schieferle, SPUSD assistant superintendent for Educational Services; Andrea Rubin Ventura County Office of Education; John Tarkany, coordinator of Student Competitions; Adam Gratt, educational technician; SPUSD school board members Michelle Kolbeck and Jeri Mead; and Todd McWherter, president of the

Santa Paula Federation of Teachers.

Finishing off the guest list were the three people beaming in the room with pride, Sand’s mother, Noreen Sand, father Dr. Jon Sand, and Sand’s wife, Melina Sand.

Sand said his dad, who was standing with him, is his role model: “My dad is an amazing teacher. I love having him a phone call away.”

Sand then pulled out a special yellow and white book with a photo of a green-clad elf with green hair holding a key, called “The Key to Read.” “This is really emotional for me,” Sand said as he explained: “My grandmother was a teacher as well. She was the author of a book, ‘The Key to Read.’ My aunt was the artist who drew all of these elves who teach children to read. I keep this as an inspiration. It’s taken a lot to get here, a lot of sleepless nights. It’s always worth it.”

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