



School news

from the Santa Barbara County Education Office

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Rotary Club selects SBHS teacher for special recognition

The Rotary Club of Santa Barbara recently recognized Santa Barbara High School special education teacher Eric Nichoson for his extraordinary contributions to public education. It is the first of four such awards the Rotarians will present to area educators this academic year.

Nichoson is a resource specialist, teaching grades 7-9. This year he is co-teaching American Government, Economics, U.S. History, and Algebra 1. He has been at Santa Barbara High School for 12 years. Prior to teaching at SBHS, Nichoson taught in the San Diego City school system for two years.

Since 1986, the Rotary Club of Santa Barbara has honored outstanding teachers from South Coast schools each year. It awards a high school, junior high, elementary, and special education teacher with a certificate and a \$1,000 check to spend on classroom needs.

“Our teachers are second to none and perform daily heroic acts on behalf of students and families,” said County Superintendent of Schools Bill Cirone, whose office coordinates the recognition with the Rotary Club of Santa Barbara. “We appreciate the vision, caring, and commitment of the Rotary Club of Santa Barbara in making annual awards that recognize the contributions of outstanding teachers, while providing resources that enable them to enrich their classroom environments.”

“The Rotary Club of Santa Barbara is committed to supporting the Santa Barbara County Education Office, and it gives us great pleasure to recognize the efforts of outstanding teachers like Nichoson,” said Mike Bieza, chairman of the Teacher Recognition Committee of the Rotary Club of Santa Barbara. “Rotary of Santa Barbara and Rotary International members know that educators like Eric Nichoson have a tremendous impact on their students, who one day will be the leaders of our community.”

Nicholson took an unconventional path to the classroom. “I didn’t complete my undergraduate work until I was in my mid-30s because I was not ready to commit to being a ‘student,’” he says. “When I did, I treated it like a job.” He completed his education at UCSB in 18 months and graduated summa cum laude. He subsequently earned his teaching credentials at California Lutheran University.

“I can attest to the fact that he is one of the truly great people that works with our communities’ kids,” said Santa Barbara High School principal Dr. John Becchio. “As a special education teacher he is motivated by the fact that he gets to positively influence and help the students in our community who need it the most, and they are often the ones who want to be at school the least because school has always been hard for them due to their disabilities.”

“Mr. Nich,” as he is affectionately called, was himself inspired to become an educator by one of his high school teachers. He has been seen at local thrift stores buying dictionaries for his students, proctoring a special exam session on a Saturday so he can read the test to a student with dyslexia, attending athletic and extracurricular events so his students know he is interested in them beyond the classroom, and roaming the hallways with his quirky ties saying hello to everyone he passes.

“Mr. Nich is certainly one of the bright spots in his students’ school day,” Becchio continued. “It is my honor and privilege to call him a colleague. He truly makes a difference, every day.”

The Rotary Club of Santa Barbara meets at Fess Parker’s Doubletree Resort in Santa Barbara for lunch from noon to 1:30 p.m. on Fridays. Recipients of the club’s Teacher Recognition Awards are made with the assistance of the Teacher Programs and Support department of the Santa Barbara County Education Office.

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