

WISDOM, INSPIRATION and TENACITY (WIT) AWARDS

Wisdom, Inspiration and Tenacity – Who has all of these qualities and then some? Meet some extraordinary educators who were honored by Farmers and the California Association for Bilingual Education at their recent 2005 Annual Conference. The awards ceremony was co-hosted by the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles.

Their stories are heartwarming and their deeds inspirational.



(From **L to R**): *Luis Sahagun, Farmers, Jennifer Root, Hodge Elementary School, Azusa, CA, Guadalupe Torres, Vail High School, Montebello, CA, Shelley Spiegel-Coleman, Californians Tomorrow, Richard Takeyama, Tule Lake Internment Camp, CA and Luisa Acosta-Franco, Farmers*

Guadalupe Torres

Guadalupe Torres has served students and parents in some capacity for over 30 years, most of which has been as a volunteer. She has been known to provide financial assistance, out of her own pocket, to students who would otherwise not be able to attend their own prom or purchase their own graduation pictures.

Guadalupe's dedication is clear in her own words about what motivates her, "I have a passion for helping young people realize their potential and giftedness. One of my goals is to instill a sense of pride and honor for our students. I have found that children of all ages learn fastest by having positive role models and lots of examples, therefore, I try to be a good role model."

Jennifer Root

As a school principal, Jennifer Root has one of the most challenging jobs imaginable -- trying to meet the needs of school superintendents, teachers, parents, and ultimately, her students.

In her first year as a teacher, Jennifer was assigned to teach the English language learners. A student from another class innocently remarked that she must be the new teacher of the “dumb” kids. Later that same year, in preparing for back-to-school night, a colleague remarked that she should be happy if 30 percent of her Spanish-speaking parents showed up.

Fortunately, as a teacher and now as a school principal, Jennifer Root has refused to accept the status quo. Her belief in her students and their families resulted in a prediction of 30 percent participation becoming a reality of 100 percent. And, she has re-instilled a sense of personal pride and responsibility in her teaching staff so that more of them are getting their bilingual certification. Not surprisingly, the results in the classroom have been outstanding.

Shelley Spiegel-Coleman

Shelley Spiegel-Coleman is the current president of Californians Together, a statewide coalition of parents, teachers, education advocates and civil rights groups committed to securing equal rights to quality education for all children.

Shelley is a well-known advocate for children and a renowned scholar in the field of bilingual education and a much-requested conference speaker, presenter and resource for the media.

An admirer of Shelley’s work best sums it up...”Shelley has always been committed to children, especially those most disenfranchised by the system. She has never backed down from a tough fight on behalf of those most in need. Unfortunately, she hasn’t always won, but the fact that she is willing to stand up for what is best for all children gives us hope that one day things will change. I hope she never gives up because if she ever does, it will be a dark day for all of us.”

Richard Takeyama

More than sixty years ago, 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of them American citizens, were unconstitutionally forced by our government to give up their businesses, neighborhoods and freedom to live in internment camps during World War II. Located in harsh, remote climates in various parts of the U.S., camp life was anything but normal in the ten major camps. However, there was a group of dedicated individuals who felt that these young Americans were as deserving of an education as anybody else and went to great lengths to create as normal a school environment as possible though they were surrounded by barbed wire.

Earlier this month, the Japanese American National Museum on behalf of thousands of former internees and their families, honored these teachers who sacrificed so much to help young Japanese Americans get their educations and ensure their futures. Richard Takeyama was a bilingual educator who taught the Japanese language to students in

Arkansas and the Tule Lake internment camp in Northern California. In his early 20s, he became one of the youngest Japanese school principals in the camps. One of Richard Takeyama's students said of him, "He had a method of teaching the Japanese language that made it lots of fun to learn. He was very strict, but also very understanding."

For all of your outstanding achievements – your wisdom, inspiration and tenacity – Farmers Insurance, the California Association for Bilingual Education and the Japanese American National Museum are proud to honor you.