

RATON ~ NEW MEXICO NEWS



Photo by Tim Keller

Russell Woods and his RHS band are more than a little happy with their success.

Russell Woods leads RHS band to state honors

By TIM KELLER
The Chronicle-News

At the end of 2007 Russell Woods was laid off from his job directing music at Tohatchi High School on the Navajo reservation in western New Mexico, a victim of the No Child Left Behind program which shifted resources from the arts to the core subjects. On February 1, 2008, he filled a vacancy with the Raton Schools. Though he's struggled with a seemingly superhuman workload, the past two weeks have proven the success of his efforts.

Last weekend, Woods's Raton High School band won 3rd place in the New Mexico 3A Band Competition at Los Lunas High School. The preceding week had foreshadowed the achievement when the same band went to the Northwest District Concert and Sightreading Festival in Bloomfield, NM, and outscored every school there, including the much larger 4A and 5A schools from around the region.

The momentum seemed to begin with a mid-April concert at the Shuler Theater shortly before the Bloomfield competition. As success built upon success, the jubilation of both the band and Mr. Woods seemed to be accompanied by a sense of surprise, as though they hadn't known how good they'd become.

The job Woods accepted little over a year ago had been vacat-



Photo by Marty Mayfield

Russell Woods conducts the RHS band in a performance at the Shuler Theatre two weeks ago.

ed in mid-year by his predecessor: It comes with the standard six classes to teach, but his classes are at two different schools – Raton High School and Raton Middle School – and each class is a performing ensemble requiring extensive planning, teaching, rehearsal, and performance. His title is "Director of Performing Music." And "Teacher."

Woods credits former music director Bill Crary with much of the current success. Crary retired three years ago from the position Woods now fills. "This isn't all me," Woods insists. "Mr. Crary has a lot to do with this. He did a great job preparing the kids for this opportunity." Woods is also grateful that Crary has returned to teach and direct the RMS choir, freeing Woods to have a planning period.

Last Friday at 6:00 p.m., the RHS band took the stage at Los Lunas High School to perform their required three contrasting pieces. First, a dramatic work: they played "Rise of the Vulcan." Next, a slow melodic piece that demonstrates musicality: "Heartland Heritage." To close, a fast-paced piece that shows off the band's technical skills: "Rag Doll Dance." They left the stage and collected two Excellent ratings and one Superior rating. Then they rode on the RHS activity bus to Applebee's to eat and celebrate the end of the season.

Back in Raton Saturday morning, Woods called Los Lunas to find out where his band had placed. "She wouldn't tell me! She just said, 'It would be worth your while to drive back down here for the awards ceremony.'" Woods collected

band members Mallorie Salazar and Tera Gonzales and drove back to Los Lunas. At the ceremony, they were called to the stage to accept 3rd place in the state.

The word spread quickly back to Raton and to all the other band members, including flutists Tyler Angeli, Mariah Fleming, Alexis Hester, Erica Hopper, and Elizabeth Strnad; percussionists Hunter Allen, Ryan Garcia, Bubba Martinez, Christopher Simpson, and Benjamin Trujillo; trumpeters Tera Gonzales, Dale Proctor, and Darrell Segura; trombonist Alex Grine; clarinetist DeAndra Gonzalez; saxophonists Seth Romero and Mallorie Salazar; baritone Jimmy Carroll; and tenor Riley Wilson. Christina Sanchez and Carrie Cordova are also active members of the band but were ineligible for competition.

Woods himself took some time this week to breath deeply and smile. In his own playing, he specializes in the brass instruments. The French horn is his instrument. Asked about a recent Marty Mayfield photograph in The Chronicle-News showing him playing violin with the band at the Shuler Theater, Woods laughs heartily. "I actually sat down and learned the violin with my students this year." He laughs again. "Oh, gosh."

It's been a tough, demanding year. It's been a good year.

NMAA to suspend all athletic, activity extracurricular programs due to H1N1 virus

Special to The Chronicle-News

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – The New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Public Education Department announced today that Carlsbad High School, Deming Intermediate School, all public schools in the Socorro Consolidated School District including Cottonwood Valley Charter School in Socorro and all public schools in the Lordsburg Municipal School District will close May 4 through May 10 due to probable cases of H1N1 influenza.

Based on the fact that the Public Education Department and the State Department of Health have made these closures, the New Mexico Activities Association Board of Directors has suspended all athletic and activity programs for all NMAA member schools, until further notice.

This decision includes all extracurricular activities (after school practices, games, activities, etc.)

The NMAA staff will remain in constant communication with

the Public Education Department and New Mexico State Department of Health to provide all necessary updates as the situation continues to develop.

The NMAA is committed to the safety and health of all students, and will respond appropriately regarding the scheduling of the upcoming Spring State Championship events.

Additional resources for information related to the swine influenza:

Center For Disease Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm

New Mexico Department of Health
<http://nmhealth.org/index.html>

New Mexico Public Education Department of Education
<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/>

For more information pertaining to this announcement, please contact Robert Zayas, NMAA Director of Communications, at 505.977-5386.



Photos by Tim Keller

Tecolote painter Martin Montoya at Des Moines School. Martin Montoya spent three days painting with kids this week.

Tecolote artist Martin Montoya brings a spark to Des Moines School

By TIM KELLER
The Chronicle-News

Martin Montoya paints images on canvases for a living. He doesn't paint coyotes or cowboys or Indians, nothing that would make his work an easy sell in Canyon Road galleries. In fact, Montoya's work is characterized by wild creativity that tends toward the playful and the colorful. His art is spontaneous and prolific.

He met his perfect match this week – the kindergarteners, first graders, and second graders of Des Moines School. Montoya spent Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday working with students as an artist-in-residence through the school's Art Plays Its Part program. He claims he doesn't teach them anything.

"I just give them a little bit of guidance. They already know what to do." Asked why, then, the school would hire him, he responds, "I'm here to open that little door." He smiles. "I don't feel like I teach anything. I just spark their creativity. It's already there – it just spreads. It has a life of its own. I just strike the spark."

At the end of the day Tuesday, his students had produced enough art to overflow the art room – stacked on tables and counters, posted on the walls, and lining the floor down the hall and around the corner. They produced two long murals for next week's spring play, and dozens of tempura-on-paper paintings. Kindergarteners painted portraits of "Mom and Me" for Mothers' Day while first and second graders painted spring flowers, some of which will be used Tuesday night in the school's original play, "Spring Flowers for Skinny Horse".

Montoya was born and raised in Las Vegas, New Mexico, but has lived in the same house in the small village of Tecolote since 1991. He and his wife, artist JayJay Montoya, and their 3-year-old son Martin Jr., live a simple life that has allowed them

to make a living on art – though Martin says they recently added a solar panel for electricity. "I'm thinking of getting an antenna now," he grins sheepishly. "You know we have a little boy." They have no computer and Martin doesn't know how to use one, but he figures his son will teach him sooner or later.

After graduating from West Las Vegas High School, Montoya attended both UNM and New Mexico Highlands, but he never pursued a major. "I just took art classes. I consider myself self-taught. All those classes – they let me do whatever I wanted." And he's done well with what he wanted. He's sold a pair of oil paintings for \$20,000 each – one of those, "El Pueblito", 4'x5' in size, hangs at UNM Children's Hospital in Albuquerque.

"I've drawn a lot. I've filled many manuscript books, tons of them. I had a collector. I'd fill the books with drawings and he'd buy them." Montoya made one drawing in a book each day. The collector, who lives in Santa Barbara, California, stopped after buying 30 manuscript books filled with original Martin Montoya drawings.

Montoya has also painted with acrylics and made sculpture in both bronze and wood. Nowadays, though, oil painting is his focus. Eight of his works are permanently installed in public places around New Mexico. He often works big, though for public installations he prefers to stick to a four-foot height – because the oil paintings must be enclosed in Plexiglas, which is sold in 4'x8' sheets.

Because he usually wears his inner child on the outside, he looked quite at home sitting on the floor of the hall at Des Moines School Tuesday, surrounded by five- and six-year-olds, doing just what they were doing – playing with paints, making something new, laughing, having a bit of fun. He didn't tell them what to do, but you could almost see the sparks.

The N.R.A. Whittington Center Shooting Range in New Mexico caters to all in the middle of nowhere

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Whittington. It opened in 1973 after the former New Mexico governor Bruce King traveled to N.R.A. headquarters in Fairfax, Va., and successfully lobbied board members to choose his state for the facility.

By 1977, when the N.R.A. was escalating its involvement in national politics, the organization established a special contribution fund to make the shooting center self-sufficient.

"We stay out of politics," Armacost said. "It is part of our charter. We could jeopardize our nonprofit status by making political statements."

There are 15 shooting ranges covering various distances, including a 1,000-yard range for high-powered rifles, silhouette ranges, ranges for shotguns and muzzle-loaders, and a range for law enforcement officers.

"They accommodate everything from skeet to archery," said Jeff Encinias, manager at Elite Sporting Goods in Raton, N.M. There is also a cafeteria and classrooms.

The center has had more than one million visitors, and not all were toting guns.

Top attractions are recreational shooting and guided hunts, but there is also camping, hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. Artists rent cabins to take photographs of wildlife or paint landscapes.

"Yes, we are a hunting and shooting facility, but there's so much more you can do," said Armacost, a Maryland native who

moved west in 2005 after graduating from Cornell in Ithaca, N.Y.

The center has been a boon during tough times for Raton, a blue-collar town of 7,000 residents that historically relied on coal mining. These days, shooting enthusiasts prop up the economy.

Community officials estimate a \$7 million annual impact from the shooting range.

"We get a lot of business because of the Whittington Center," Encinias said. "They have a lot of shoots and events, which helps us out quite a bit."

The center is in the foothills of the Valle Vidal range, equidistant from Denver, Albuquerque and Amarillo, Tex.

"If you're into hunting, it's heaven here," Jennifer Wiseman, the director of the Raton Chamber of Commerce, said.

Historic ruts of the Santa Fe Trail run past the center's administration building, which includes a gift shop, a firearms museum and a library. The site is below Red River Peak, a landmark for pioneers on the trail.

Armacost said 122,000 guests visited last year, a significant drop from 180,000 in 2007, which he attributed to last summer's higher gasoline prices.

This year, he is projecting 150,000 visitors based on entries for several national championship shooting competitions. Whatever the number, those folks pump cash into Raton's hotels, restaurants and gasoline stations.

"We don't underestimate the value, the

impact, that the Whittington Center has on Raton, especially from May through October, when their bigger shoots and competitions are held," Wiseman said.

Visitors, who have come from all 50 states and from many countries, can choose lodging in Raton, but the facility offers full-service hookups for 175 recreational vehicles, as well as rooms, primitive campgrounds and remote backcountry cabins.

Armacost said he did not believe the center had seen any measurable boost in activities or interest based on an increase in firearms sales since President Obama's election.

"Where we live in the country, people have always been interested and enthusiastic about firearms," Armacost said. "We are not being overrun by people wanting to come out and shoot their new guns."

Armacost said the center's youth adventure camp is growing in popularity, with 96 children firing 174,000 rounds last year. The site has hosted women's groups, teaching firearms safety and outdoor skills.

Boy Scouts visit often, detouring from the nearby Pihlont Scout Ranch.

"It's all about education," Armacost said.

The Whittington Center's mission is simple: Provide shooters with the nation's finest facility.

"Some people say Raton is in the middle of nowhere, but I prefer to say we're in the middle of everything," Armacost said. "For a good portion of our country, it's a day's drive and you can be here."