

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools*

May 15, 2003

## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Tulare County Office of Education Announces: 2003 *Excellence in Education* Award Winners Announced**

*Tulare County Administrator of the Year  
Tulare County Teacher of the Year  
Tulare County School Employee of the Year*

A selection committee of 18 Tulare County business, community and educational leaders met recently and chose the Tulare County Administrator/Manager of the Year, Teacher of the Year and School Employee of the Year for 2003. The *Excellence in Education Awards*, now in their ninth year, are used to recognize “the best of the best” in each of three categories.

“Because the nominees representing school districts throughout the county and the College of the Sequoias were so highly qualified, selecting the award winners was not an easy task,” says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak.

Once the difficult task of selecting winners was completed and rating scores were verified, Vidak set out earlier today to personally deliver the good news to the winners.

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The Tulare County Office of Education and County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak are pleased to announce the following *Excellence in Education Award* winners:

## **TULARE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR/MANAGER OF THE YEAR – SENAIDA GARCIA**

Senaida Garcia, the project director for the Tulare County Office of Education Child Care Educational Program, was selected as the Administrator/Manager of the Year. Throughout Garcia's more than 36 years as director, the Tulare County Office of Education Child Care Education Program has flourished. Considered by many as a "pioneer" in the field of early childhood education programs, Senaida Garcia worked to create the first program that utilized a variety of funding sources to meet the needs of parents beginning in 1967.

"Senaida Garcia is a role model to us all. Senaida's belief in the importance of each person attaining their educational goals to create change in the community is apparent in the way she lives her life and encourages others to do the same," says Superintendent Vidak.

A Fresno State University graduate, Garcia was the first female and Hispanic board member of the Visalia Unified School District. Inducted into the College of the Sequoias Hall of Fame in 1989, chosen as the Visalia Chamber of Commerce Woman of the Year in 1996, and most recently recognized as one of the Visalia Soroptomist International Women of Distinction, Senaida Garcia

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has made a difference in the lives of many residents of Tulare County. Garcia is the longest seated member of the Foodlink Board of Directors and also champions United Way. In addition, Garcia is a board member on the Tulare County Children and Families Commission.

Garcia's philosophy has always been to recognize that parents are the first teachers and that early childhood education is vital in creating life-long learners. One of her career goals of providing early childhood educational services in every community of Tulare County has become a reality. The program now has a center-based, home-based or licensed family child care program in all the communities with 41 Head Start child development centers in the county, including the recently-opened center on the Tule River Indian Reservation.

Overseeing more than 600 staff members and providing services to more than 6,000 children and their parents, Garcia says one of the greatest honors she has ever received came in September 1998 when Child Care opened its model center and training site and the vote was unanimous to name the center the "Senaída Garcia Child Development and Training Center."

## **MARTHA KARJALA, 2003 TULARE COUNTY TEACHER OF THE YEAR**

Currently a fifth-grade teacher at Rocky Hill Elementary School in Exeter, Karjala began her career in education more than 30 years ago. She obtained her Bachelor of Science degree, teaching credential and Master of Arts degree from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona, before

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taking her first teaching assignment at Flagstaff Elementary School. Martha taught there for two years before accepting a teaching position at Conyer Elementary School in Visalia. For the last 20 years, Karjala has been employed by the Exeter Union Elementary School District and has taught many elementary grade levels – including third- and fourth-grades.

Rocky Hill Principal Pam Canby says, “Mrs. Karjala is an outstanding teacher who provides a rigorous academic program that does not recognize categories of students; all students excel in her classroom. It is always an incredible experience to watch Mrs. Karjala teacher; she is such a master!”

Martha is highly regarded throughout the school district and the Exeter community as a talented teacher and colleague. Thanks to Karjala’s teaching philosophy and outpouring of creative teaching practices, students are well versed in the standards. In addition, Karjala believes in nourishing the entire community. She writes: “It’s a good day when one of my students says, ‘Oh no! It’s recess already?’ And it’s been a good career when a 28-year-old, former student inhales deeply while walking through the classroom door and says, ‘Mmm, it smells just like coming home!’”

## **MARTHA FLORES, 2003 SCHOOL EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR**

Martha Flores, School Employee of the Year for 2003, has been employed by the Porterville Unified School District for 22 years, with 19 at her present position as Administrative Assistant to the Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services.

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Porterville Unified Superintendent Dr. John Snavely says, “While Martha has maintained an incredible work ethic for the school district, she has also made significant contributions to the welfare of the community.”

Ms. Flores has a true passion for helping within the community and is particularly interested in helping those less fortunate than herself. From 1981-1984, she served as attendance secretary for Monache High School in Porterville, which was, incidentally, the high school from which she graduated.

Ms. Flores is a board member and vice chairperson of Family HealthCare Network and has served on the Tulare County Domestic Violence Task Force Committee and as a board member of the Porterville Mission Project. She is also sole proprietor of Frugal Fashion and has spoken to numerous organizations on “Domestic Violence Awareness” and “Self-Esteem and Motivation.”

Assistant Porterville Unified Superintendent Val Staley says, “Frugal Fashions is Martha’s individual contribution to the community. This project provides fashion counseling and clothing to individuals or groups entering or re-entering the job market.” Martha says, “I have been able to guide many students on the values of education and self-esteem and shared my belief that no one person should be discarded – perhaps, they just need to be restored and revived.”

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“We wish to thank our longstanding partners in this Excellence in Education employee recognition program, the Educational Employee Credit Union, its President/CEO Bruce Barnett, and board of directors,” says Jim Vidak. “Throughout the years, they’ve been instrumental in helping us to honor these fine, well-deserving people with this award.”

Award recipients and finalists will be honored at a recognition breakfast later this year.

For more information, contact Darlynn Billingsley at 733-6302 or visit our website at [www.tcoe.org](http://www.tcoe.org).

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Rel: 17/03