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A big cheer for Kelly principal Tressie Armstrong

By John Roach

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She helped turn last October's near-tragedy into a miracle, setting a shining example for "miracle" recovery after a shooting incident at the elementary school over which she presides as "Top Cougar." She energetically motivates and inspires students to "remember to make good choices for healthy minds, bodies and spirits." She is beloved by all in her school community. Now, Kelly Principal Tressie Armstrong has been named Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Region 18 2011 Elementary Principal of the Year. Region 18 covers all of San Diego and Imperial counties.

Each of our CUSD site administrators is outstanding and every campus features a unique culture, but the minute you step onto Kelly's green, you know you're in a special place. Among her staff, Tressie commands respect because she gives it. With all, she engenders enthusiasm because she exudes it.

The Kelly culture is collaborative, dynamic and informal, but still businesslike; well, as businesslike as it can be with students ducking into Tressie's office (with a courteous "Excuse me, Mrs. Armstrong!") to obtain treats for her calm canine, Rosie the Reading Dog.

Tressie has created a warm, supportive learning environment at Kelly. Throughout the year, she meets individually with students to review their academics on her computer; gently but candidly showing where they've missed the mark and guiding them to improvement. It's paid off: for several years, Kelly's API scores have consistently exceeded 920 out of a possible 1,000. Based on her belief that academics and athletics go hand-in-hand, she has motivated the entire Kelly community to pursue fitness, with the result being multiple Governor's Challenge awards and wonderful new playground equipment.

A Defining Moment in a Career That is Her Calling

October 8, 2010 was a defining moment in Tressie's career and life. The story begins long before that day when a lone gunman scaled the fence and wildly began shooting at kids on the playground during lunchtime recess. At our District, all schools drill rigorously for emergencies. Tressie drilled her staff and students as if their lives depended upon it, so when their lives actually did depend upon their reactions, they responded quickly and calmly, following her strong example. Afterward, many staff and students said how safe and secure they felt while huddled in classrooms hearing Mrs. Armstrong's voice reassuring them that all was well.

Tressie believes that education is not merely a career. "It is a calling. If we want to make the world better, we have to choose love over hate and courage over fear; not just say it, but do it," she said. "And we have to teach children to do the same. Carlsbad is an incredible community with outstanding schools. I'm super proud to represent our District and very excited to receive the award. But, it's about all of us working together for one common cause: our children. This award is for them. Kelly Cougars: You are much loved!"

The IT Girl

Carlsbad High School teacher Minnie Curtis and mother of 10th-grader and Speech and Debate team member Davin, says, "I credit Mrs. Armstrong for sparking my son's interest in writing when she was his teacher in elementary school."

A local firefighter who attended high school with her recalls, "Tressie did it all. She was a cheerleader and enthusiastically involved in just about every activity. She was our IT girl."

Here at Kelly, and throughout Carlsbad Unified School District and the wider Carlsbad community, she still is. Please join me in congratulating Tressie Armstrong, our 2011 Elementary Principal of the Year.

