



For Immediate Release – photos attached (captions below)
January 24, 2021

VCS Names Frank Garaitonandia Teacher of the Year

DAYTONA BEACH – Citrus Grove Elementary School art teacher Frank Garaitonandia, a Cuban immigrant who believes, “there is no greater creative act than sparking a child’s mind,” is this year’s Volusia County Schools Teacher of the Year.

Garaitonandia was selected from 71 nominees representing schools countywide and was one of five finalists for the district award. He will now represent Volusia in the state Teacher of the Year program.

The VCS Teacher of the Year ceremony, held Sunday, January 24, at the Ocean Center, was a socially distanced event attended by honorees and friends of public education. It was presented by AdventHealth, official healthcare champion of VCS, and was co-hosted by FUTURES Foundation and Volusia County Schools.

Garaitonandia succeeds Holly Hill School fifth-grade teacher Josie Ruth Stumpf, who was Volusia County’s 2021 Teacher of the Year.

A graduate of the University of Florida, Garaitonandia was an exhibiting professional artist before becoming a teacher 16 years ago. He started at Citrus Grove in 2014. His family fled Cuba for political freedom when he was 8 years old, and they lived in Costa Rica for four years before migrating again, to Florida. Teachers welcomed and nurtured him along the way as the only constant in a sea of change, he said.

“Giving children a voice is my life mission,” Garaitonandia said. “It is those students with a language barrier, academic difficulties, or a discipline problem who most need the arts. The act of self-expression and self-discovery materializes a path toward their futures. It is those students who inspire me to be there for them, the ones who cannot see their next steps.”

The other finalists who received special recognition at the ceremony were:

- Joe Biggs, kindergarten teacher, R.J. Longstreet Elementary
- Megan Martens, kindergarten teacher, Sweetwater Elementary
- Adrienne Palmer, ESE teacher, Deltona High

- Joey Powell, director of bands, Silver Sands Middle

Special awards were also announced for three teachers who represent VCS' three guiding principles. Superintendent Dr. Carmen Balgobin presented the awards along with a \$150 check from FUTURES to:

- Guiding Principle #1, Dedication to Increased Student Achievement – Dr. Zena J. Ramsey, math intervention teacher, Edith I. Starke Elementary
- Guiding Principle #2, Commitment to Finding Solutions to Problems – Jim Lowenstein, digital video technology teacher, DeLand High School (note: Lowenstein was unable to attend and will receive the award at a later date)
- Guiding Principle #3, Mutual Respect and Positive Relationships with all Stakeholders – Marianne Dolce, media specialist, Sunrise Elementary

Also recognized during the ceremony was Robyn Trosan, School Way Café manager at Tomoka Elementary, who won the 2020 Superintendent Outstanding Achievement Award. The other winner of the Superintendent Outstanding Achievement Award, DeLand Student Transportation bus assistant and trainer Nelly May Evans also was unable to attend and will be recognized later.

Major sponsors of the Teacher of the Year celebration include:

Presenting Sponsor – AdventHealth

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FUTURES Regent's Club Members – Alexis Lenssen, CFP of Lenssen Wealth Management Group at Ameriprise Financial; Cobb Cole; Duke Energy; Florida Health Care Plans; Florida Power & Light Company; Launch Credit Union; and Rue & Ziffra

FUTURES Chancellor's Club Members – Brown & Brown Insurance; Hyatt and Cici Brown; Coloni Family Foundation; Foundation Risk Partners; Giles Electric Company; LPGA; and Sam and Barbara Willett

Major in-kind sponsors – Dean Stewart Photography; Nina B. Hollis Institute at Stetson University; Simply Roses; Stonewood Grill & Tavern; and Wishworks Media

Dozens of businesses and organizations in Volusia County also contributed donations of goods and services to Volusia's Teacher of the Year program.

CAPTIONS:

VolusiaTOTYwinnerwithgroup: Citrus Grove Elementary art teacher Frank Garaitonandia, center, was named VCS Teacher of the Year on Jan. 24. From left are Superintendent Dr. Carmen Balgobin, School Board Vice Chair Jamie Haynes, Garaitonandia, Diamond Motors & Marine owner Craig Conway, and FUTURES Foundation for VCS President Robert Ludlow.

VolusiaTOTYcelebration: VCS Teacher of the Year Frank Garaitonandia celebrates with his school family after the announcement.

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