

# IUSD Today

News and Notes from around the Irvine Unified School District

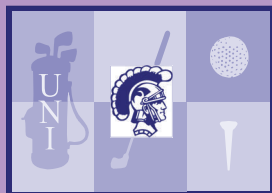
## Inside!



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## Success stories abound in IUSD's classrooms

This year, we've spent a lot of time discussing finances – and for good reason. The state's fiscal crisis has stripped California's schools of billions of dollars, and it's not over yet.

But economic uncertainties can't overshadow the amazing things that continue to happen each day in our schools. From our classrooms and labs to our theaters and athletic fields, the students of Irvine are continually writing and



**Gwen Gross**  
SUPERINTENDENT

rewriting their own success stories, getting assists along the way from Irvine's parents, staff and volunteers. I'd like to share just a few of those stories with you.

Last month, our Board of Education recognized Woodbridge High sophomore Alyssa Hansen, who won a nationwide digital arts competition and a cash prize of \$10,000 for writing and illustrating a graphic novel titled, "The GUARDians."

Organized by the Pearson Foundation and By Kids For Kids (BKFK), "The Digital Arts Challenge" was established to reward outstanding young storytellers who utilize digital technolo-

*(Please see SUCCESSES on page 6)*

## Best of the Best

### Sierra Vista Middle School's Kathy Marvin is named an O.C. Teacher of the Year

Kathy Marvin clasped her hands anxiously as the distinguished visitor in her classroom began to speak.

"We have a very special surprise for all of you to hear," William M. Habermehl, the county superintendent, told the class. "Your teacher was selected ... to be one of the Orange County Teachers of the Year."

With that, applause erupted in Mrs. Marvin's science classroom at Sierra Vista Middle School, as it often does when a Marvin experiment emits a loud bang or a flash of light. Habermehl turned and handed over a trophy

*(Please see TEACHER on page 4)*



Photo courtesy of the Orange County Department of Education

**Kathy Marvin, a science teacher at Sierra Vista Middle School, accepts the award as one of five Orange County Teachers of the Year from county Superintendent William M. Habermehl.**

# Distinguishing themselves

## It's no April Fool's Day prank – seven IUSD sites learn they're California Distinguished Schools

Baron was skeptical, to say the least. The man on the phone was claiming to be Jack O'Connell, California's superintendent of public instruction. On the other hand, it was April Fool's Day, and Baron, the principal of South Lake Middle School, had already been victimized by pranksters who playfully rearranged his office furniture and placed a plastic flamingo and a stuffed monkey in the tree outside.

"Look, if it really is you, Jack, I'm very appreciative," Baron cautiously told the caller. "But if this is someone else from my staff, I want you to know that I'm not being taken in."

Turns out, it was O'Connell, and the state's schools chief had good news – he had called to personally inform Baron that his school had earned the state's highest level of recognition as one of this year's California Distinguished Schools.

South Lake wasn't the only IUSD campus celebrating on April Fool's Day. In fact, Lakeside, Rancho San Joaquin, Sierra Vista and Venado middle schools were also told they were among the 261 California Distinguished Schools for 2009, as were Northwood and Woodbridge high schools. Each site personally received a call from O'Connell.

Dr. Gavin Huntley-Fenner, president of IUSD's Board of Education, called the recognition "a testament to the hard work and commitment of our students, parents, staff and community toward setting high expectations for each student."

"To have a single California Distinguished School in the district is a tremendous accomplishment," Huntley-Fenner said. "To have seven schools earn this prestigious honor in one year is truly phenomenal. I am particularly proud because the award recognizes the progress these schools have made in narrowing the achievement gap."

Now in its 24th year, the California Distinguished School program spotlights exemplary elementary and secondary campuses in alternating years. This year, 136 middle schools and 125 high schools were honored after each submitted a comprehensive narrative application and took part in an extensive site visit.

Campuses in the Irvine Unified School District have earned the label of California Distinguished School 40 times since 1986, and all of IUSD's middle schools and comprehensive high schools have been recognized at least once.

All 2009 honorees will be celebrated during an awards ceremony on Friday, May 29 at the Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim. This year's recipients will retain their designation through 2013, when they are eligible to reapply.



California Distinguished Schools in Irvine Unified	Years
Alderwood Basics Plus	2002, 2008
Bonita Canyon Elementary	1989, 2006
Brywood Elementary	1991
Canyon View Elementary	2002, 2008
College Park Elementary	2006
Culverdale Elementary	1998
Deerfield Elementary	2006
Greentree Elementary	1998
Irvine High	1988, 2007
Lakeside Middle	2005, 2009
Los Naranjos Elementary	1998
Meadow Park Elementary	1998
Northwood Elementary	2002
Northwood High	2005, 2009
Rancho San Joaquin Middle	1996, 2009
Santiago Hills Elementary	1998
Sierra Vista Middle	1996, 2009
South Lake Middle	1999, 2009
Springbrook Elementary	2000
Stone Creek Elementary	1998
Turtle Rock Elementary	2002
University High	1988, 1992
University Park Elementary	2000
Venado Middle	1994, 2009
Vista Verde Elementary	1993
Westpark Elementary	2002
Westwood Basics Plus	1998
Woodbridge High	1986, 2009

# Wonder Writer

## Q&A: Northwood sophomore is encouraging young writers with the promise of publication

**G**ovil Gupta loves to write. While he favors poetry, the Northwood High sophomore is also fond of penning essays and short stories. But about two years ago Govil realized there weren't many outlets for young writers who yearned to see their work published. Sure, there were a few contests, but many were held once a year, and some had age restrictions.

So Govil took matters into his own hands.

Within a few months he had established the "Wonder Writers" contest, which collects submissions from K-12 students and has the work evaluated by professionals. Once the winners are announced, the content is published in a glossy book that students and their families can purchase and share.

It all began with an initial contest back in January 2008. Since then, the ambitious 16-year-old has published three "Wonder Writers" books and is wrapping up a fourth. (For information about the next contest, go to [www.wonderwriters.com](http://www.wonderwriters.com).)

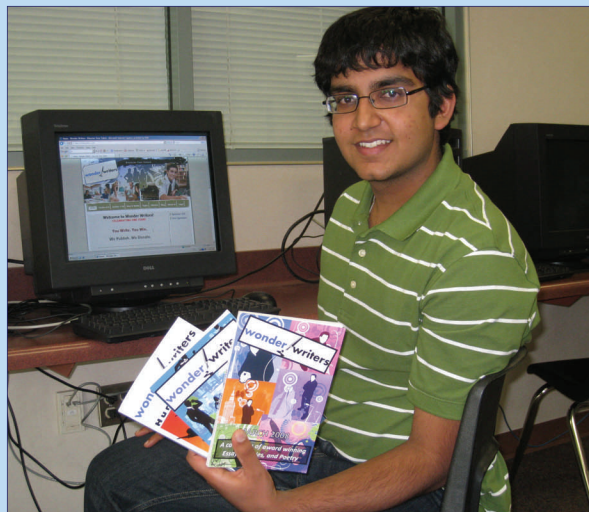
With the creation of "Wonder Writers," Govil has inspired scores of aspiring poets, novelists, journalists and essayists, giving each a chance to see their own words in print – and that's not all he's done. Proceeds from the sales of his books have gone on to benefit local charities.

*IUSD Today* recently caught up with Govil to talk about the past, present and future of "Wonder Writers."

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### Q: What challenges did you face in creating the "Wonder Writers" program?

A: I think the first one was actually building the website – that took a long time because I had to learn all the programming and get a domain name. Once I made myself familiar with that, then I think the second biggest challenge was publicizing it and making people believe that it was legitimate, because many people were astonished when they found out that it was just a high school sophomore – especially since we were giving iPods away and gift cards. People were a little hesitant at first, but I got a couple of my teachers on board and got them to support



Govil Gupta, a sophomore at Northwood High School, shows the books he established to give aspiring young writers an outlet for their work. "Wonder Writers" was created in 2007.

me.

### Q: Who else did you get involved?

A: A partner for us is the "Team Kids" organization, led by Ms. Julie Hudash. She just found me through an article that was published in the newspaper. She's more of a mentor because she's had 10 years of experience with Team Kids as a charity organization. So she's been able to tell me where to go to publicize it and how to approach people. We also have many local businesses that help fund the book's publishing and the prize donations, including a couple of tutoring centers around Irvine. There are some restaurants as well.

### Q: Why do you feel writing is important for young people?

A: I've been asked this question many times, and I think that writing is a part of every career. No matter what you choose, writing is always going to help you out. Whether it's to write an email to your boss or to a CEO, or whether it's trying to publicize an event, you always need writing. In history you need it to communicate how the world has progressed and how it has affected us. In math, word problems would be one example, and even in science you need to explain your experiments.

That being said, I think writing is also important be-

*(Please see WRITER on page 4)*

## TEACHER: Marvin is now eligible for state honors

(Continued from page 1)

topped with a golden apple.

"I think I'm going to have a heart attack," said a stunned Marvin.

"Don't do that," responded Habermehl. "There are too many fun things coming up to have a heart attack."

Indeed, the following evening Marvin would be attending a banquet recognizing her selection as IUSD's Middle School Teacher of the Year. For earning county honors, she'll be treated to another special dinner at the Disneyland Hotel in October. And she'll go on to compete for state Teacher of the Year – and who knows what else.

Habermehl, who is superintendent of the Orange County Department of Education, made his surprise visit to Sierra Vista on the morning of May 7, bringing with him a busload of media members, local education officials and event sponsors, including Disneyland, SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union and the Orange County Register.

While the county superintendent's appearance caught some off guard, few would characterize Marvin's selection as a surprise.

The eighth-grade science teacher is admired by students and colleagues alike, having earned a reputation for delivering lessons that are both technologically advanced and highly engaging. In addition to writing numerous grants to

obtain state-of-the-art teaching tools and equipment, she has developed a popular science/engineering exploratory class that features group projects on roller coaster physics, robotics, water rocket science and other inspiring topics.

She also brings in scientific experts to deliver special lectures for her classes. And when she's not blowing out ceiling tiles with electrifying experiments, she's assisting with IUSD's energy conservation efforts and leading in-services at other schools and districts.

A day after Habermehl's visit, Marvin and more than 40 of Irvine's brightest teaching stars were honored at the Irvine Marriott during the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Excellence in Teaching Awards Dinner.

About 850 guests attended the event, which was sponsored by the Exchange Club of Irvine in conjunction with The Irvine Company, the Irvine Teachers Association and the Irvine Unified School District.

Along with Marvin's accolade, Kathy Sulack was celebrated as IUSD's Elementary School Teacher of the Year and Cindy Peronto was honored as the IUSD High School Teacher of the Year.

Educators from individual school sites and a handful of district programs were also praised as Outstanding Teacher Representatives for 2008-09, and four first- and second-year teachers were recognized as "Teachers of Promise."

## WRITER: Contest could go national and beyond

(Continued from page 3)

cause it's a form of art as well as a form of communication.

**Q: What are the benefits of being published?**

A: First of all, I think it gives you the encouragement that every writer needs. That's what people usually write for – they want to be able to share their thoughts and share their feelings with everybody else. But the benefits of getting published go further because you're almost immortalized. As somebody once said, "To write is to live forever," and that's what happens when you're published.

**Q: Tell us about the charity aspect.**

A: Once all of the book sales are done, whatever money we have left goes directly to charity. Usually what we do is have a poll with the

writers to determine which charity they would like to support. In the past, we've donated to Children's Hospital of Orange County, the Dylan Bradshaw Memorial Fund, The ALS Association and we've also committed some money to the Leukemia Foundation.

**Q: What does the future hold for Wonder Writers? Is this going to continue?**

A: Right now, we are actually receiving entries from Minnesota and Oklahoma and even Indonesia. I'm not sure how they learned about it, but just by word of mouth, it's spreading.

Basically, what I want to do is impact the lives of more people because I know there are a lot of young writers out there who are looking for this outlet. I just want to make sure that they know that "Wonder Writ-

ers" is a place where they will be able to get their writing published and a place where they can meet with fellow authors. In the future, what I really hope to do is at least go statewide, national or maybe perhaps international, so everybody has the opportunity to write. And for those who don't like to write right now, or those who don't recognize the importance, perhaps I can get them started on writing so they'll be hooked on it throughout their lives.

**Q: What words of encouragement would you offer for other aspiring young writers?**

A: There's no right or wrong answer in writing – anything you write is good. So I would encourage them to just keep on writing. The more they write, the more they'll improve, and they'll learn that people will start to appreciate their thoughts.

## Scanning our District

# They drive, they putt and they crack the books

The girls' golf team at University High School isn't merely a monster on the greens. They're pretty good with the books too.

This year, the team earned the CIF Southern Section Academic Award, meaning the squad had the highest cumulative grade point average of any team at any school in the Southern Section. Averaged together, the girls posted a GPA of 3.833 – all non-weighted.

The CIF annually spotlights teams from each sport based on their cumulative GPAs and names one overall winner. Schools are divided into two enrollment categories: 1,500 and above and 1,499 and below.

Uni falls into the larger category but would have easily bested the smaller schools. The team will receive a special banner to commemorate their achievement, which was also acknowledged during a pre-game ceremony at a recent Los Angeles Angels home game.

"This is quite an honor, considering the CIF Southern Section has more than 560 schools," said Uni Athletic Director Mark Cunningham. "Awesome job, both athletically and academically."

### Lakeside makes History and moves on to national contest

This year, 35 students from eight different middle schools in Orange County were selected to participate in the state's distinguished History Day competition in Sacramento. Of that bunch, 20 were from Irvine's own Lakeside Middle School.

Sponsored by the Constitutional Rights Foundation, History Day is a statewide program that annually promotes research and analytical thinking.

Student groups created their own historical papers, posters, exhibits, performances and multimedia presentations related to this year's theme, "The Individual in History: Actions and



The girls' golf team at University High School has distinguished itself both athletically and academically. Recently, the squad earned the CIF Southern Section Academic Award for having the highest cumulative grade point average of any team at any school.

Legacies."

Led by history teachers Jon Pang and Kelli Seydewitz, Lakeside sent 18 students in five groups to compete in the junior division, which included grades six, seven and eight. In the end, all five groups made it to the final round, and two of those groups will be advancing to the National Contest in Maryland.

Lakeside's Emily Avazian, Lizzy Avazian and Stephany Kim will be making the trip to submit their exhibit on Witold Pilecki, a member of the Polish resistance during World War II. Amanda Abunimeh, Reme Ataya and Tristyn Wong will compete with their documentary on Thurgood Marshall, the first African American to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

### Uni students take national championship in Washington

University High's Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) program has won the national Academic Bowl championship in Washington, D.C. The quiz-style tournament, established by Gallaudet University, held its finals the last weekend of April.

Over 80 schools from across the country competed in this year's Academic Bowl, and the top 16 teams qualified for the nationals. In the finals,

University beat the Indiana School for the Deaf – the defending national champions – by a final score of 37-36, after going 8-1 in the tournament.

Principal Jon Levy and coaches Kay Anderson and Scott Kramer were on hand to celebrate the victory with team members Manuel Alvarado, Emily Schwartz, Moises Jaramillo, Gianni Mangianelli and Jessica Walker.

### Proposed stadium EIR to be discussed by Board on June 9

On June 9, the Board of Education will consider certifying an Environmental Impact Report associated with a proposed district athletic facility at University High School.

A requirement under the California Environmental Quality Act, the EIR is a document that includes potential mitigation measures as well as public comments. The process is designed to support informed decision-making.

IUSD has proposed developing a new 2,944-seat athletic facility/stadium on the north side of the Uni campus where the school's football field and athletic track are currently located.

If approved, the venue would serve as the home field for University and Woodbridge high schools.



“providing the highest quality educational experience we can envision.”

### Board of Education

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### Got a story?

Have an idea for an *IUSD Today* story or a submission? Contact Public Information Officer Ian Hanigan at [ihanigan@iusd.org](mailto:ihanigan@iusd.org) or call (949) 936-5002.

Don't forget to learn more about the Irvine Public Schools Foundation at [www.ipsf.net](http://www.ipsf.net)

## The Irvine Unified School District

# SUCSESSES: Irvine students continue to shine

*(Continued from page 1)*

gies. Alyssa did just that in creating an art-driven novel about five members of a high school color guard squad who use their skills to protect the President of the United States. Though they lack traditional superpowers, Alyssa notes that they rely on “brains, personality, confidence and each other” – much like many of our own students.

By winning this competition, Alyssa had the opportunity to visit Pearson’s imaging plant to see how books are produced. One of those books just happened to be her own.

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Over at Northwood High, Govil Gupta is also making his mark as a writer – and he’s giving other young authors and poets a chance to do the same.

Govil, a sophomore, recently launched “Wonder Writers,” a series of writing contests open to students of all ages. Each contest is based on a central theme, and the essays and poems submitted are judged by a panel of professionals. Afterward, the collection of work is published in a book that students and their families can purchase. The proceeds go on to benefit local charities. (You can read more about Govil’s endeavors on page 3 of this publication.)

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Nitish Lakhanpal, a senior at University High, was recently named a finalist in the annual Intel Science Talent Search, which is America’s oldest and most prestigious high school science research competition.

Nitish was among 40 students nationwide to be selected as finalists in this year’s contest. Each qualified for at least \$5,000 in scholarships, a new laptop computer and a trip to Washington, D.C. to compete for more than half a million dollars. And they received another perk during their stay in the nation’s capitol – they all got to shake hands with the President of the United States on the steps of the White House.

Something tells me this will be one of many science accolades for Lakhanpal, whose research was aimed at predicting the structure of proteins.

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The successes aren’t just happening in our high schools.

Four second-graders from Westwood Ba-

sics Plus have won first place in the 2009 ExploraVision Awards.

Anika Chaukkar, Dhruv Limaye, Rahul Mohankumar and Roshan Mandayam presented the top submission in the contest organized by Toshiba and the National Science Teachers Association. Their project, called “CTRIC Pathways,” envisions cars that are powered not by gasoline or hybrid engines, but rather by electricity that is transferred wirelessly, in this case from specially outfitted lampposts.

Again, these are second-graders. Just imagine what they’ll come up with as third-graders.

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A team of sixth-graders from Eastshore Elementary recently won first place in this year’s Edison Challenge.

Eastshore fielded the only all-sixth-grade team in the annual environmental science competition and beat out 43 other middle schools with an ambitious composting project. The local contingent was led by teacher Bill Brooks and included students Danielle Krikorian, John Tudhope, Julia Eilers, Kelly Petrovich, Kenton Van Persum and Rhodri John.

Science educator and television host Bill Nye “the Science Guy” personally presented the Eastshore students with their award certificates. Next up, the team will participate in activities at the USC Wrigley Institute on Catalina Island for a week in June.

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These are, of course, just a few of the success stories happening in our district. In fact, every day, in every classroom, there are inspired epiphanies and accomplishments worthy of celebration, as the level of instruction and engagement has never been higher.

Though budgetary matters are part of our charge, we know there’s more to running a school system than mere numbers. Though accolades and test scores are often the barometers by which academic progress is measured, we know there’s far more to teaching and learning.

Ultimately, our triumphs will be linked with the deeds, ideals and relationships of the students who will pass through our classrooms but once.