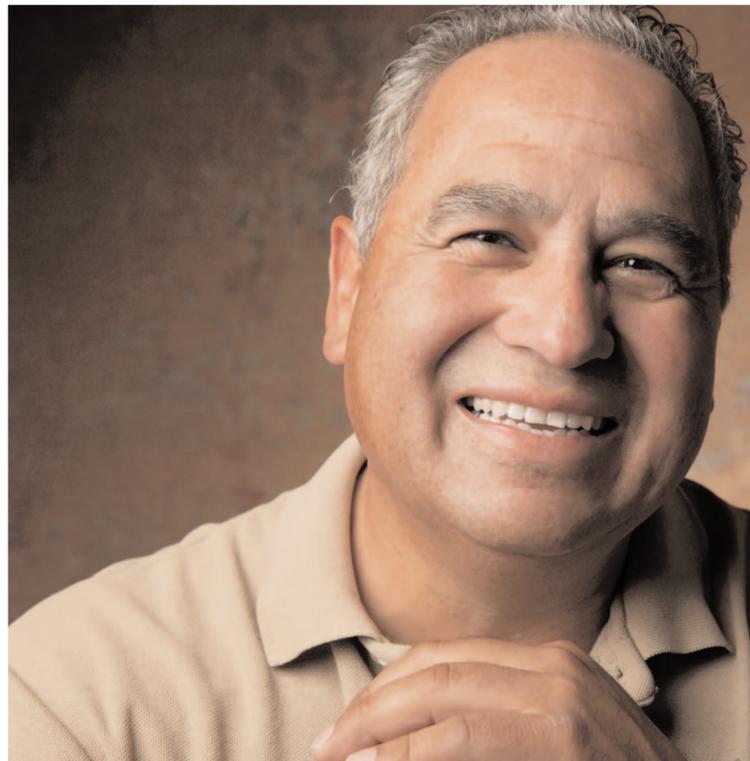


hero in education



Oscar
Gonzales

Always at Work with a Smile and a Song

Oscar Gonzales is a man of many talents and interests – music, golf, baseball, construction, and being a friend, dad, and grandfather. Quite the Renaissance man, he loves variety and is the picture of productivity. He relishes the opportunity to solve problems, and, as he says, likes being “extremely busy.” That’s why his job as a maintenance technician for the Irvine Unified School District (IUSD) is perfect for him. It’s also what makes him an OCTFCU Hero in Education.

“I like solving problems and making the schools safer for the kids,” explains Oscar. Of course, he also likes the fact that each day there is a list of 40 projects waiting for his department and, with 33 schools in the district, absolutely no danger of running out of things to do.

After growing up learning construction from his father, going into school maintenance seemed like a natural fit for Oscar. As he says, “I liked the idea of doing something different every day, and creating a better environment for the kids.” Oscar does all the repairs to the concrete, playgrounds and sidewalks, and builds add-ons to the teachers’ patios. With so many projects each day, he says, “We have to take on one at a time, and organize them based on when we can get to the job site. We come in early to get the repairs done before the kids show up.”

“People call us the ‘A Team’ because we get so many compliments from teachers,” he adds.

After 20 years on the job, Oscar is as committed to his “A Team” as ever. He loves taking on projects and seeing them through to completion. But perhaps his greatest joy is receiving the many hand-made thank-you cards the students give to him. He remembers one special letter he received from a blind student thanking him for repairing a part of the sidewalk that had been pushed up by tree roots and caused him to trip.

Another highlight for Oscar was being named an IUSD “Employee of the Year” for the 2001-2002 school year. “They had a meeting – I thought it was just another safety meeting. Then I saw balloons and wondered what was going on. The next thing I knew, they were calling my name.” Oscar was awarded \$350, including \$100 from OCTFCU, and a letter from the Board of Education in Sacramento. He was one of only five classified employees out of 1,000 in the IUSD to receive this special honor.

Melanie Weekley, who provides clerical support for IUSD’s Construction Service, has worked with Oscar for five years. She recalls when a few years ago Oscar took time out of his busy schedule to help her father remodel his home. “When my dad needed help, Oscar was there. He redid the bathrooms, prepped the paint, and retiled the kitchen – and taught me how to do it. We spent a lot of weekends working on the house.”

At work, “He’s awesome,” says Melanie. “He’s here every day. If something needs to be done, he’ll work a weekend if he has to so the students don’t have to be around the construction. He’s a blessing to everyone because he’s so sweet and reliable.”

A single father, Oscar raised his daughter, age 24, and son, age 20, by himself. Lately he is enjoying teaching his five-year old grandson to play baseball – another one of his talents. In his days on the Santa Ana College varsity baseball team,

Oscar could pitch curve balls at 90 mph. He also had the opportunity to play with many players who went on to the major league. Oscar also plays basketball and, in his spare time, likes to play golf, “or at least attempt to!” as he puts it.

But what might surprise people most about Oscar is his passion for music and performing. He started playing drums in junior high school, and has since become an award-winning percussionist for a local band called “The Latin Blues Project,” a six-member ensemble with a musical style similar to Santana. The band plays at various restaurants and recently competed in the Orange County Music Awards finals. Oscar’s band placed second out of 1,200 nominated bands. They also played to a crowd of 300 at a fundraiser at St. Barbara’s catholic church in Santa Ana. Oscar’s dream is to some day perform in front of a packed audience at a large venue like the Hollywood Bowl.

But for now, Oscar appreciates the simple satisfaction of seeing the kids’ smiling faces and just enjoying what he does each day. “That’s always fulfilling,” he says. And that’s why Oscar is our Hero in Education. ■

he-ro (p) (hîr’o) *n. pl. he-roes*

A person noted for special achievement in a particular field.