



Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District
14306 Park Avenue, Victorville, CA 92392
(760) 245-1661

MEDIA RELEASE

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For further information contact:

Violette Roberts, Community Relations & Education Manager

Mojave Desert AQMD (760) 245-1661 ext. 6104

**TOP ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS & STUDENTS
RECOGNIZED BY MEEC**

Victorville – Four educators and five students were recognized for promoting environmental stewardship in local schools, as the Mojave Environmental Education Consortium (MEEC) presented its annual MEEC Teacher and Student of the Year awards on March 15 in Silverlakes, CA.

Frank Cleary, a kindergarten teacher at Mariana Elementary School in Apple Valley, was presented the top “Teacher of the Year” award by MEEC. School Principal James Woods nominated Cleary in recognition of his efforts as advisor of Mariana’s “Green Team,” a student organization that has been implementing school wide environmental programs for the past 10 years. The “Green Team” collects leftover cafeteria scraps, leaves and grass to create compost, which is used by the students to grow vegetables at an on-site garden. Mr. Cleary also coordinates “Sneakers for Playgrounds,” a campus wide program which recycles old sneakers into safety mats for children’s playgrounds. In addition to receiving a commemorative plaque, Cleary was awarded \$300 and a palm pilot, courtesy of Staples.

Matthew Huffine of the Academy for Academic Excellence (AAE) in Apple Valley and Shelley Hastings and Paula Patterson - who team teach at Palm Vista Elementary School in Twentynine

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Palms - were awarded MEEC's "Teacher of Excellence" Awards. Huffine, a Mojave River Scientist and Biology teacher, was nominated by AAE Principal Gordon Soholt for challenging his science students with a creative and "rigorous curriculum...that requires students to move beyond repetition into comprehension." In addition to his exemplary work in the classroom, Huffine was recognized for guiding his students' groundbreaking research of the Mojave *Tui Chub*, the only known fish that is native to the Mojave River, and for maintaining an on campus habitat for desert tortoises.

Hastings and Patterson - who team-teach fourth grade - were co-nominated for their environmental efforts by Palm Vista School Principal Joseph Crites. Hastings and Patterson's classes are currently earning money for a field trip to the San Juan Capistrano mission by recycling aluminum cans. This past Arbor Day, the two teachers guided students in planting trees on campus, and are currently helping their Gifted and Talented (GATE) students plan and design a "Butterfly/Friendship Garden." The yearlong project will incorporate a dry creek bed and native desert plants, which will serve to house a desert tortoise the students hope to adopt. Huffine, Hastings and Patterson were each awarded \$100, in addition to commemorative plaques for their efforts.

Alongside the four teachers, MEEC also recognized five local students for their commitment to protecting the environment. Shayla Allen and Katelynn Dole of AAE, Amber Dencker of Columbia Middle School, Ruth Honts of Mariana Elementary and Brittnee Meitzenheimer of Sultana High School were recognized for undertaking such activities as leading a "Green School" campus club which boasts more than 80 participants, to researching and implementing revegetation efforts in the hillsides surrounding Mitsubishi Cement's Lucerne Valley plant. Each Student of the Year - who was nominated by one of their teachers - was awarded \$60 in

