



CAS teacher wins award for program

By Cindy Skalsky
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SIERRA VISTA — Sometimes it's just a good idea, and sometimes it requires a personal connection.

In the case of Elizabeth Sarinana, a paraprofessional at the Center for Academic Success Elementary School, it was a convergence of both that won her a \$500 prize as one of the top 100 teachers in the nation honored for their dedication to child safety.

Sarinana, an enthusiastic and dedicated classroom aide for second and third-graders, was struck by a feature in her students' "Weekly Reader" — a series of comic-book-style illustrations showing different scenarios of children in risky situations making good decisions to keep themselves safe.

"People tell kids what not to do," said Sarinana, "but they don't always tell them what they should do instead. That's what got me interested in the contest."

The "contest" was simply an invitation by the Honeywell Corporation, in partnership with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, for teachers to write an essay on how they incorporate Honeywell's "Got 2B Safe" program into their curriculum.

"Got 2B Safe" is promoted in the "Weekly Reader" and communicates effective techniques for children to know in order to prevent abduction, bodily harm and sexual exploitation.

"We read the 'Weekly Reader' page out loud, then talked about each situation," Sarinana said. "Each kid wrote a little paragraph or essay on one of the 'Got 2B Safe' rules. Then we talked about them."

The four rules in the program are:

- **Check First:** Children should always check with parents and guardians before accepting gifts, rides or invitations from anyone.
- **Go With a Friend:** Never go anywhere alone. Being with another person in public is safer and more fun.
- **It's My Body:** Children have the right to say NO to any unwelcome, uncomfortable or confusing touch or actions by others
- **Tell a Trusted Adult:** If anyone of anything makes a child feel scared, uncomfortable or confused, they should feel OK to tell a parent, guardian, teacher or other trusted adult.

“As a kid, I had my own unexpected, bad experiences with strangers,” said the self-described child advocate. “I wanted to know how much the kids knew, what they thought, and then work that into the essay I sent to Honeywell.”

As it turned out, the 7 to 9 year olds knew a lot and were concerned not only about themselves, but each other. They were familiar with the many threats society poses, and felt empowered by talking and writing about them.

“They used words like ‘rape.’ They wrote about being careful on the computer, not opening e-mails from people you don’t know, about asking permission to go places, or telling an adult that you’re going somewhere,” Sarinana said.

The children wrote — and read aloud to each other — their advice that you should never take a ride with anyone you don’t know, and that when you’re out in public you should stay with your parents.

They counseled their peers that if someone threatens you, you should scream that someone good will come to help. They also said you should never answer the door by yourself or give personal information to anyone.

“We spent a whole week discussing these things, and they really got into it,” Sarinana said. “I’ve seen the difference. Even if a kid goes to get a drink of water from the playground, they tell me. And they watch out for one another if someone forgets to report to an adult they’re going to the bathroom.”

Sarinana also learned that children pay attention to the news — and absorb stories regarding harm that befalls other youngsters. She also has witnessed that their newly awakened alertness and awareness has resulted in a growth of self-confidence.

“When kids feel protected physically and emotionally, when they have clear rules to follow, they feel stronger and are quicker to take charge,” she said.

As well as wanting to “win the contest,” Sarinana’s students also made a point of reporting a car that was regularly circling the school and playground — a fact promptly shared with the Sierra Vista police department.

“I’m so proud they know what to watch out for,” said the seven-year veteran educator. “It makes me happy inside they’ve not only learned, but they’ve taken it home and practice it in daily life.”

Sarinana’s prize — a \$500 gift card to Staples — should arrive any day, and she and the kids have drawn up a shopping list for classroom supplies.

The Honeywell “Got 2B Safe” child safety program received a Corporate Leadership Award from the Department of Justice and was created in 2003 with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to arm teachers, parents, and children with vital child safety skills.

“We’ll definitely enter again next year,” Sarinana said. “Working with kids is my life’s work, and I’m sharing our ideas with all the other teachers.”

Elizabeth Sarinana of Center for Academic Success Elementary School, was one of 100 award winners in Honeywell Corporation's Got 2 B Safe program for writing an essay on safety. Sarinana will get \$500 to purchase needed school supplies. (Ed Honda-Herald/Review)