



School's still in: Special-education teacher takes year-round approach

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MIDDLETOWN — School is out for many teachers in the state, but one teacher isn't taking a vacation from her students.

Kristyn Corace, a special-education teacher at Thorne Middle School has a mixed-grade class of sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders.

While they may be under the guidance of another teacher during their extended school year program, or ESY, Corace, a resident of Spotswood, is still finding ways to enrich their education.

Recently, Corace was named as a first-place winner in the "Got2B Safe!" awards program, sponsored by [Honeywell](#) and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The purpose of the contest was to recognize teachers who educate their students about abduction prevention.

"A lot of my kids with developmental disabilities are very friendly people, and they tend to hug a lot of people in the community, people they think are friends, but they may only know through repeated contact," Corace said.

Corace entered a 500-word essay detailing one of her lesson plans that teaches her students about appropriate touching, the proper adults to trust, and to sit or travel with a friend whenever possible.

"I have a mantra in my class, which is 'No hugs; high-fives and handshakes only,' so my kids learn to give handshakes or high-fives, and hugging is for home," she said.

The prize was a \$500 gift card for Staples to be spent on classroom supplies. Corace said she wasn't yet sure what she would be purchasing, but the money would come in handy regardless.

"I spend quite a lot of money on my classroom even though I have a budget. I like to give more to my kids, so I probably spend, as many teachers do, probably \$500 to \$600 out of pocket a year, every year, on my classroom, whether it be basic supplies or when we're out on trips, we get ice cream, something extra," Corace said.

Corace also sometimes brings her son, Michael, to class with her and on trips, to teach him tolerance of people with disabilities.

"Since he's been a baby, he's come to school with me, (and) met my students, just to learn tolerance and information about disabilities. He'll come home and say, 'I helped this kid today because he didn't know what he was doing and nobody would help him' and it gives him a nice level of respect for people with disabilities."

Michael, 10, said he was proud of his mother for the work she does. He said that in the past, they have run into some of Corace's students outside of the classroom and have been able to see how much progress they've made as a result of the positive learning experiences they've had with Corace.

"I like hanging out in (her) classes," Michael said. In addition to the \$500 Corace won to spend on her students, she gave to them again by organizing an art show at the Middletown Arts Center, showcasing their art work from the past year.

Corace says that each year, she chooses a theme for her students that ties in with their lessons; during the past school year, the class studied modern artists.

"We would take a certain artist and we would study that artist for two, three weeks. (The class) learned about their life a little bit, their name, and were able to identify their picture," she said.

After speaking with the staff of the arts center, Corace arranged for the students's artwork to be shown from July 28-July 31, grouping the pieces by artist.

Corace, along with Marcy McGarry, mother of one of Corace's students, transported and hung the pieces themselves.

Andrew Beard, 13, and Meghan McGarry, 16, both said they liked making prints, modeled after Japanese artist Hokusai best.

McGarry described the process of making the prints using cotton balls, stencils and a rolling pin, and described the final product as a "surprise picture."

Chris Parise, 16, said that Andy Warhol was his favorite of all the artists studied by the class. The class colored pictures of their faces that imitated Warhol's famed pop art painting, and created prints of multiple kinds of soup cans and containers. Parise chose a can of chicken soup.

"Because it's great tasting," he said.

At the gallery viewing on July 31, parents, family members, teachers and administrators all admired the students' work.

Pete Smith, vice principal for Thorne, said that he got to see the artwork during the year while it hung on display outside of Corace's classroom in the hall, but only one project at a time.

"To see it on display at once is great," he said.

Corace said that next year, she is thinking of doing unit lessons on music, instead of art, and hopes to work with the arts center again.