

Making the Grade—Five Fabulous Valley Teachers

Written by Story by Christine Whitton Photographed by Cassandra Tomei
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From early-morning prep sessions to after-school tutoring, these five fabulous Valley teachers have devoted their lives to inspiring students to reach the unreachable. Here are their stories.



Sister Joanie Nuckols, B.V.M. *Xavier College Preparatory*

For Sister Joanie Nuckols, B.V.M., teaching at Phoenix-based Xavier College Preparatory, an all-girls Catholic high school, is nothing less than joyous. And if her words don't fully express her passion, listening to her teach certainly will. "She is very down to earth," says Sydney Snyder, a former Advanced Placement European History student. "She makes the subject interesting by being very interactive."

Born and raised in Butte, Mont., Sister Nuckols attended St. Ann's, a Catholic school, where she realized early on her enthusiasm to become a teacher. Her grade school instructors and mother, who was a teacher herself, became Sister Nuckols's inspiration and motivation.

After graduating from Clark College in Dubuque, Iowa, Sister Nuckols started teaching in 1971.

Her thirst for continued knowledge earned her two additional master's degrees: one in modern European history and one in educational administration.

Over time, Sister Nuckols advanced to department chair of social studies and, eventually, vice principal of Academics and Campus Ministry. As vice principal, she continues to teach A.P. European History, an elective for juniors and seniors, and Honors United States History, which is only taught during summer school. Regardless of the class, the teacher's ending goal is always the same: That "students understand why things happened in the past," she says. "And why the world is the way it is today is based upon the history we have gone through."

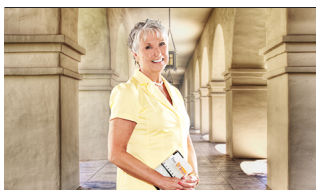


Dave Martin *Phoenix Country Day School*

Twenty-four years ago, Dave Martin made the move from teaching at a boarding school in Connecticut to become a history instructor at Phoenix Country Day School. Martin was first inspired to pursue a career in education by his University of Northern Colorado professor, Gail Rowe. "He had a reputation for being the most difficult, challenging, hardest member of the department," says Martin, whose educational background includes two master's degrees, one in history and one in secondary education. "But, if you could prove yourself under Rowe, you knew you were doing a good job."

Today, the Arkansas native, who teaches United States History and Advanced Placement U.S. History to juniors and a Holocaust studies seminar class to seniors, instills those same rigorous values in his students. "Everybody in the class wants his respect," says Conor Cathy, a former A.P. U.S. History student. "He's that kind of teacher. He inspired me to be the best I could possibly be."

Martin, who has an appreciation for history both in and out of the classroom, hopes his students leave with a deeper appreciation for the subject, in addition to being better civic-minded citizens. Proving that he loves to learn as much as he loves to educate, the long-time teacher plans to brush up on his skills this summer by reading eight presidential biographies. "It's my academic goal," he says. "And it keeps one's mind fresh." Also on the summer's agenda? Helping to grade 1,004 A.P. U.S. History exams.



Dorothy Dunnion *Brophy College Preparatory*

Dorothy Dunnion, a 32-year Valley resident, never thought of herself as a teacher. "I actually had sworn since childhood that I would never teach; I thought it would be boring," she says. "However, since I decided to major in broadcast television [at Syracuse University], my parents insisted I simultaneously earn a teaching credential, which required I student teach. I walked into my first class on my first day, and I was hooked." For Dunnion, who began teaching in 1968 in her home state of New York, next year will be her 20th year at Phoenix's Brophy College Preparatory.

As an English teacher to sophomores and juniors, an American Literature teacher to juniors, and a humanities teacher to juniors and seniors, Dunnion says the most demanding part about her position is grading. "I would say it takes on average 25 minutes to critique and grade an essay, and I teach approximately 150 students who write seven or eight essays per year, plus rewrites," she says. "However, I don't know any other way to teach writing and critical thinking other than by doing it."

Dunnion's work at Brophy isn't limited to the classroom; she also directs school plays and musicals as well as co-moderates one of its

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academic teams. “She is extremely enthusiast about the material but also as enthusiast about her care for her students,” says Bob Ryan, principal of Brophy College Preparatory.



Seven years ago, Tina Kanelos, a graduate of Boston University, set out to follow her dreams of becoming a teacher. What she never anticipated, though, were all the hurdles she would encounter along the way. “Teaching is a difficult job,” she says. “I was ready to give up on my career until I found Tesseract.” Since joining the staff in August 2006, Kanelos, a seventh- and eighth-grade American History teacher, has never been happier. “We’re a family on every level,” she says.

In addition to Kanelos’s daily class schedule, she also helps spearhead two of the school’s most successful after-school programs: Tesseract Action Force for You (TAFFY) and Tesseract Community Outreach (TCO). TAFFY, which Kanelos founded, is a community service club that allows middle school students to volunteer at food banks, the Phoenix Herpetological Society and HomeBase Youth Services. Also, Kanelos helps coordinate TCO, a day when Tesseract students go out into the community and help in any way they can. “Tina is always thinking about how to improve her practice as a professional educator and how to instill an ethical and compassionate global perspective within her students,” says Nigel Taplin, head of school at Tesseract.

As much as she values taking part in such service-oriented programs, Kanelos finds that her students enjoy getting involved just as much. “Getting the kids out of their seats helps a lot,” she says. “A child’s perspective is a very valuable thing.”



Born and raised in Scottsdale, Tanya Bartlett knew that wherever her career took her she would one day return to the warm weather and blue skies of Arizona. After graduating from the University of Arizona with a degree in history, Bartlett spent her first year teaching at St. Catherine’s in Phoenix on an emergency teaching certificate (a certificate to teach in high-need subject areas due to a teacher shortage). But life soon steered her in another direction and out of state.

After moving to Pennsylvania and pursuing a career in publishing, Bartlett returned to Phoenix and joined Scottsdale Healthcare. During her tenure in healthcare, Bartlett’s grandfather fell ill. His final words of wisdom to her: “If you do what you love, you’ll always be happy.” Bartlett knew her happiness was in education. The next week she enrolled at Rio Salado College and earned her teaching certificate. After graduating, Bartlett joined Notre Dame Preparatory as a social studies teacher where she just concluded her seventh year.

As a history buff, Bartlett teaches government and geography classes, including honors and advanced placement courses, to ninth and 12th graders. After school, Bartlett runs the Invisible Children’s Club as a moderator; in the club, students work to change the lives of kids in Uganda. She hopes that her faith, passion for learning and love of sharing knowledge will influence her students to follow their hearts and pursue their dreams, just as she did. “She has inspired me to always look for ways to improve myself and to not let the little things get me down,” says Kayla DeCant, a former World Geography Honors student.