



New Mid Valley teacher is familiar face in Gorge education

By Trisha Walker, *Columbia Gorge News*, Sept. 2, 2020 edition

Bernardita Ramos — or Ita, as she is also known — has dreamed of being a teacher since she was a child — and this year, that dream has come true. Ramos was recently hired as the second-grade dual language teacher at Mid Valley Elementary for the 2020/21 school year.

Ramos, 55, graduated on June 14 with a teaching degree from Portland State University. She was accepted into the Bilingual Teacher Pathway (BTP) and began the program in the fall of 2018, sponsored by Hood River County School District — the first Hood River teacher to graduate from the program.

But her teaching history in the Gorge goes back much farther.

Ramos immigrated to the Hood River from Rancagua, Chile in 2000 with her husband, Patricio Ramos, a chemical engineer, and daughter, Loreto Ramos (who has since earned a bachelor in biochemistry and natural science, and math). No one in the family spoke English, which she describes as their first and most significant obstacle. The language barrier was also her biggest challenge when she decided to go back to school for her teaching degree.

“I always wanted to be a teacher, and I remember that, as a child, I wanted to be a P.E. teacher,” she said. “I don’t know what happened over time, because I ended up studying business in my country. I was working in that for several years until my family and I moved to the U.S.A.

“In a way, my desire to be a teacher was again born here.”

Initially, she worked jobs that did not require English. She picked cherries and worked in a restaurant. She began to study English two days a week in the Hood River County School District’s English language learner program (ELL).

“To learn a second language in all its forms — writing, speaking and reading — when you are an adult is not easy to achieve,” she said. “At least, it wasn’t for me, because I am still learning and studying every day in order to improve my English.”

After she felt she had a grasp of the language, she began studying at Portland Community College, earning her Associates degree in applied science, paraeducator. That degree led to a job as an instructional assistant with the Hood River County School District, and then at The Dalles School District at Dry Hollow Elementary, where she worked for five years.

During this same period, she also worked in the ELL program for adults at Columbia Gorge Community College in The Dalles and Hood River.

“Working at the ELL adults’ program, I began to see the need to help people who come to this country, just as I arrived a long time ago without speaking the English language,” she said.

In the mornings, she worked as an instructional assistant at Dry Hollow; in the evenings, at CGCC, helping adults learn English. Often, her students came with their children.

“The children waited for their parents in a classroom and they did their homework while they were waiting for them,” Ramos said. “Most of these children were my students in the morning school’s ELL program (in The Dalles);

therefore, it was like going to class also because they brought their homework and did it there. Whenever they had doubts or did not understand the subject, they would come to me to understand better, or I would help them with their homework.”

She remembers this time as “beautiful and comforting as a person and a professional” because it led her to go back to school herself and earn her second Associates degree in applied science, this time in early education and family studies at CGCC’s Hood River campus.

Her teaching continued even through the summer months, working at Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC) as a preschool teacher.

She moved back to the Hood River County School District and decided to go back to school once again — this time to earn a teaching degree. Being accepted into the BTP program meant she was required to work full time for HRCSD and speak at least two languages.

“In this case, through Catherine Dalbey (HRCSD director of human resources), the Hood River County School District gave me all the facilities required to enter the program and be able to graduate,” she said.

She quit working at CGCC to devote herself entirely to her studies, but every day, she would go to work for HRCSD until 3 p.m. and then travel to Portland State University for classes, Monday through Thursday from 4:30-9:30 p.m.

“I traveled to Portland for two years for the duration of the program,” she said. “I usually got home every night around 11 p.m., depending on traffic and weather. In the summer, I had classes in Portland everyday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.”

It wasn’t easy. She credits her husband and daughter for helping her get through the long says.

“I had to work full time, I was making a round trip every day to Portland, and I needed to have time to study as well as take time with the family,” Ramos said. “I was busy on weekends for two years because I had to finish my homework for the week and study to be prepared for the next one.

“In this part, my husband and daughter took a very important role because without their support and help, I think maybe I wouldn’t have made it,” she said.

“I’m very proud of myself because going back to the university as an adult isn’t easy, and studying in a language that is not your native language is a big challenge,” she said. “But, if you follow your dreams and love what you are doing, no matter how old you are, you can fulfill your dreams.”

This will be her second year at Mid Valley Elementary, having begun teaching in the classroom in 2019 with students. She had almost seven months of classes before the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything.

“Adapting to a new teaching method has not been easy for anyone, whether they are parents, students, teachers, directors or anyone involved in the educational system,” she said. “The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close their doors, impacting students around the world. That is why it is essential to take into account that we are experiencing a global health crisis, which affects us in all aspects of our lives.”

While she doesn’t know what this new school year will bring, she is ready to meet the challenge.

“I think the important thing about this pandemic is that teaching must be flexible and adapted to what the student needs,” she said.