

Local teacher recognized for outstanding service to the community

By **Costa Hovris** - May 14, 2021



Vicki Theophilopoulos, better known as Ms. Vicky, with a group of her kindergarten students. Photo: Matias Brunet-Kirk

In the concrete schoolyard next to Sinclair Laird Elementary's gym, a mix of educators, students and citizens gathered last Thursday to underline the exceptional work of 8 teachers from the English Montreal School Board.

Coinciding with National Teachers Appreciation Week in the United States, the celebration was created to recognize excellence in educators and underline the importance of the profession. Winners were awarded recognition certificates as well as gift cards.

One of the winners that day was Park Extension's own Vicki Theophilopoulos, a well-known kindergarten teacher at Sinclair Laird Elementary School.

"Ms. Vicky"

Better known by her students and colleagues as "Ms. Vicky," she is said to have "provided calm, caring and intelligent support to children, parents and colleagues alike."

"She has been and continues to be rock and a precious one at that! In my years as a Sinclair Laird parent, I can say that Ms. Vicky is loved by all and is an outstanding educator," Governing Board Chair Amanda Liste, adding that it was a "unanimous decision." She was joined by seven other winners, including physical education teacher Joseph Romano of John Caboto Academy in Ahunstic as well as Lea Zuravlyov, Mauro Corneli, Itzhak Raz, Patrick Bramm, Silvia Bilotto and Galina Gatsko, who make up the mathematics staff of John F. Kennedy Adult Education Centre in St. Michel.

Fulfilling kindergarten experience

Having been a teacher for 14 years with 11 of them at Sinclair Laird, she was very pleased

to receive the award. "It's a great honour," said Theophilopoulos, adding that it was "really nice to be recognized, especially during such a challenging school year."

Because the pandemic forced so many changes on students, educators and parents, Theophilopoulos wanted to make her class feel as normal as possible.

"I really wanted these kids to have a normal, engaging, fulfilling kindergarten experience," she said.

She added that she tried to keep the talk of COVID-19 to a minimum and rather focus on being young and having the best school experience. She underlined that she found it "really important to have fun and promote a normal kindergarten environment."



Good memories

The awards ceremony was also attended by many of Ms. Vicky's current and former students. Sitting in rows in the schoolyard, the students watched the ceremony attentively and responded eagerly.

Matias Battista is in the third grade and is a former student of Ms. Vicky. He remembers his time in her class enthusiastically and with a tinge of nostalgia.

"It was when we were having playtime at the end of the day," reminisced Matias of his favourite memory of kindergarten. "That's when I would make my art," added Matias, adding that he really loved the art projects Ms. Vicky would make them do.

Always a helping hand

Grade 3 student Samrah Razaq was also one of Ms. Vicky's former students. She remembers her time in kindergarten as being fun and playful, and that Ms. Vicky was always there for her students.

"When I used to need help, she would always help me," said Samrah, adding that Ms. Vicky played a part in shaping who she was now.

She vividly remembers her favourite memory of kindergarten as being the end-of-day playtime as well.

"At the end of the day, I liked when we would play, like so much," said Samrah, adding that she loved "playing with all of the dolls."

Unanimous decision

All of those in attendance seemed to agree that all the educators recognized truly deserved

it.

"We're here to celebrate outstanding teachers in the English Montreal School Board," said Derrek Cauchi, the principal at Sinclair Laird, adding that it was one of the "first times we're actually getting together with anyone, for over a year."

Cauchi also underlined his deep appreciation for the work Ms. Vicky had put in during a particularly difficult year and said she was essential in creating a comfortable environment for all.

"Because of her consistency, and because of her calm, and because of the way that she has a very caring and understanding way of interacting with not only the children but also the adults," said Cauchi of why they had chosen Ms. Vicky.

"Vicki has been instrumental in making sure that we do the best we can to help people feel comfortable and confident," he added.

Should be celebrated more often

Cauchi was happy to get to celebrate the great work of all the teachers at the EMSB and added that it needed to be done more often.

"So we're very happy to have this opportunity to celebrate that and give recognition that she really deserved," said Cauchi and concluded by adding that "everybody deserved extra pats on the back, and that's what this is about today."

Ms. Vicky receiving her award, accompanied by city councillor Mary Deros and school staff. Photo: Matias Brunet-Kirk

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