

# Parent-involvement coordinator named WSFCS Classified Employee of the Year

BY KIM UNDERWOOD  
WINSTON-SALEM/FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS

Javier Correa-Vega is passionate about doing everything he can to help students and parents. If he can help someone, he does so without regard to whether it's included in his job description. He never passes anyone without speaking, and he always has a smile on his face.

Those are just some of the complimentary things that people had to say about the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools' 2015 Classified Employee of the Year. Correa-Vega is the parent-involvement coordinator at Philo-Hill Magnet Academy. Superintendent Beverly Emory and others surprised him one morning with the announcement.

Correa-Vega has been in school news in recent months because he is one of the people working on creating a parent-involvement bus that will go out into the community to serve families throughout the school system.

As important as that project is, said Ken Leak, the chair of the school system's Classified Advisory Council, it was the day-to-day work that Correa-Vega does helping students and their families that convinced those on the selection committee to pick him. "The committee saw him as a genuine, good person - a big guy with a heart of gold."

When presented with the award, Correa-Vega said that the recognition belongs not just to him but to all the staff and students in the building. "It's a great school - good people," he said later in the morning.

"He embodies a culture of service," said Kenyatta Bennett, the principal at Philo-Hill. "He is proof of that every day. He hit the ground like a ball of fire and he has been running ever since."

At one time, Correa-Vega was a police officer, and Emory said that she was impressed by his desire to trade in handcuffs for hands to hold when reading his nomination.

"We're proud of you and what you do for your kids," Emory told Correa-Vega.

Correa-Vega is married to Ana Ortiz, who also works for the school system. She is a bilingual community coordinator and the assistant district coordinator for the Toyota Family Literacy Program. Both Ortiz and their daughter, Dalymar Correa-Ortiz, were on hand.

Correa-Vega and Ortiz are from Puerto Rico, where he was police officer working with people under house arrest. After they moved to Winston-Salem, he worked for two years as a detention officer with the Forsyth County Sheriff's Department.

Correa-Vega was one of four finalists for the recognition. The other three were Pam Buie, an administrative assistant at Parkland High School; Shareka Brown, the testing coordinator and first- and second-grade assistant at Petree Elementary School; and Tesha Green, a primary reading teacher and office assistant at Sedge Garden Elementary School.

When Correa-Vega was announced as one of finalists in February, Stacie Persinger, who teaches theatre arts at Philo-Hill, was so excited that she sent out an email far and wide. With Correa-Vega, she said, you never hear him say, "I can't."

You mention that you need something such as translating into Spanish a permission slip for a field trip and "It's done. He's everywhere."

Correa-Vega and Ortiz met in Puerto Rico. Both happened to be attending a party given by mutual friends. Ortiz had been having trouble with a supervisor at work, and, to her, Correa-Vega was just a guy sitting on the couch when she began talking to a friend about it. When Ortiz got to the point in the story when she suggested that the problem might be that her supervisor, who was quite tall, wasn't getting enough oxygen to her brain at those heights, Correa-Vega, who is 6 feet, 5 inches tall, stood up.

"I don't think so," he said.

"I looked at him," Ortiz said, "and he smiled. And he said it would be nice if we went out to eat one day."

What could she say but "sure"?

At dinner, they hit it off. "He has a big heart and he is such a caring and humble person," Ortiz said. "He is a very hard worker. I am so proud of him."

Five months after they were married, they moved to Winston-Salem, where one of Correa-Vega's sisters was already living. She had told them it was a good place to find work.

They didn't speak English at the time, and, as they learned it, they worked such jobs as making cigarettes for Reynolds Tobacco Co. and the metal boxes containing telephone equipment that you see here and there. After working for the Sheriff's Department, Correa-Vega came to work



Javier Correa-Vega basks in the spotlight with his family — wife Ana Ortiz and their daughter, Dalymar Correa-Ortiz; Superintendent Beverly Emory; and Kenyatta Bennett, the principal at Philo-Hill.

for the school system nine years ago as a teacher assistant in the ESL (English as a Second Language) Academy at John F. Kennedy Middle School (now high school).

He later became the home/school coordinator at Hill Middle School and was there until it merged with Philo to become Philo-Hill Magnet Academy.

Correa-Vega and Ortiz have now been married for 14 years, and Dalymar, who is a seventh-grader, admires her father's courage for helping others.

Correa-Vega drives a 1974 Volkswagen Beetle that he restored and painted Carolina blue. He has pictures on his phone that he can show you if you ask.

The parent-involvement bus project is a partnership with Konnoak Elementary School, which is nearby. Many Konnoak students go on to Philo-Hill. Shelia Burnette, who is the principal at Konnoak, was among those at Philo-Hill this morning for the celebration.

"Javier is a leader for children and for adults," Burnette said. He takes every opportunity he sees to recognize the work of others and to support people, she said,

"and the children see that."

Correa-Vega has been invited to a national conference being held later this month to talk about the parent-involvement bus project. So, as it happened, he had the materials that he prepared for that, and he did a quick presentation for the guests at the celebration.

Correa-Vega's colleagues at the reception spoke highly of him.

"He always keeps a positive attitude," said Howard May, the day porter at Philo-Hill.

"You never see Javier without a smile," said Jo Collins, the lead counselor.

John Fulton, who teaches eighth-grade social studies, praised his willingness to serve. If you need a translator or someone to help with a home visit, all you have to do is send an email and he gets back quickly with an offer to help and, when you

see him in person, a smile on his face. "People like that are few and far between," Fulton said.

"He is a people person," said Kara Brooks, the curriculum coordinator. "He goes beyond the call of duty to help anybody out."

Committee members who got to know Correa-Vega a bit during the selection process also spoke highly of him.

To work with children, said Mary Shackleford, a teacher assistant at Walkertown Elementary, you have to love what you do. And he clearly does, she said. "He has the heart for it."

Paul Luper, who is a carpenter with the school system, said that, after learning all that Correa-Vega does for children and parents, he was thoroughly impressed. "He sold himself."

Correa-Vega said that his philosophy is simple: He wants to do what he can to help young people become successful. "It's all about kids," he said.

## Innovative Child Care Downtown Winston-Salem

**CURRENTLY ENROLLING**

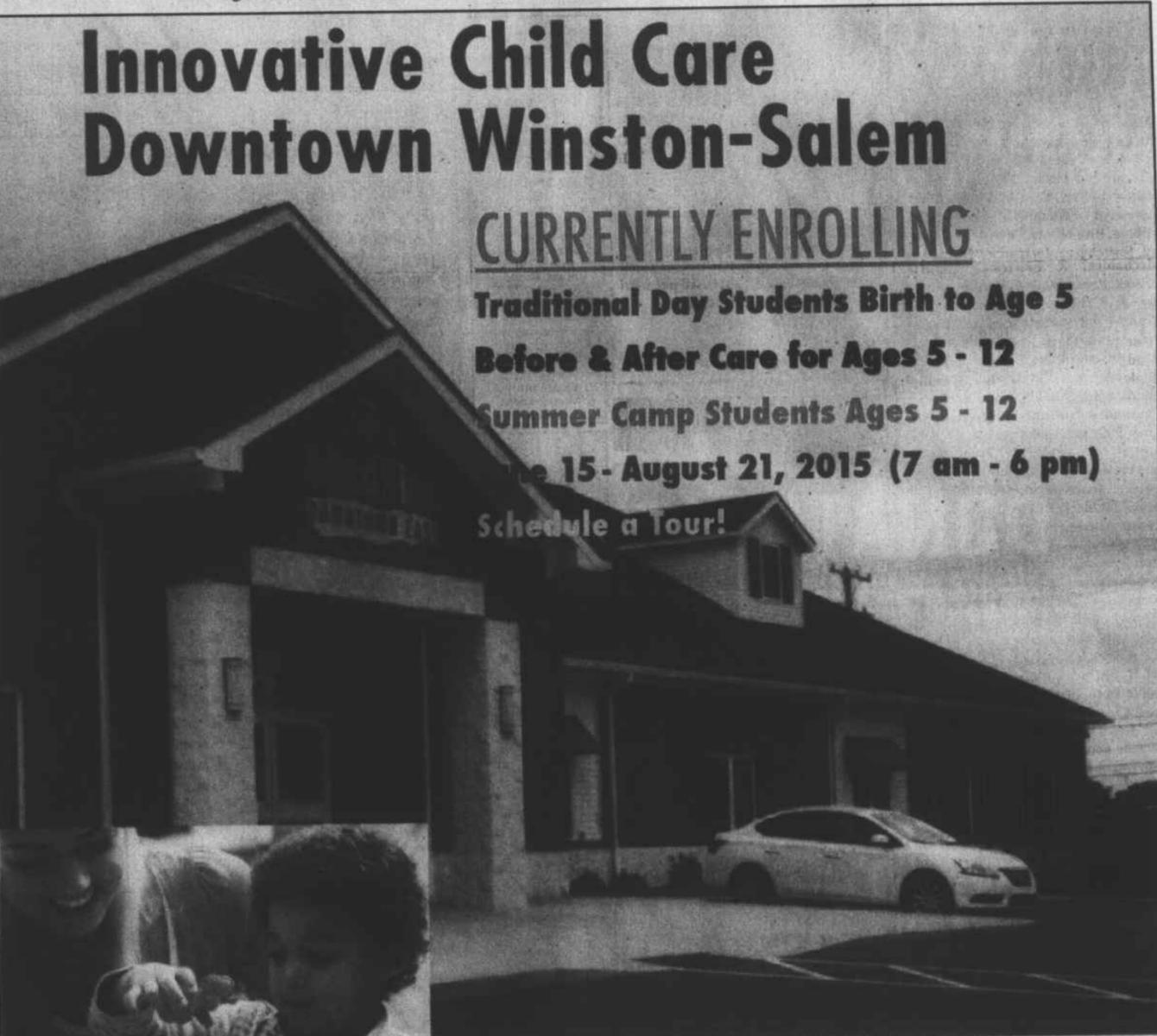
**Traditional Day Students Birth to Age 5**

**Before & After Care for Ages 5 - 12**

**Summer Camp Students Ages 5 - 12**

**July 15 - August 21, 2015 (7 am - 6 pm)**

**Schedule a Tour!**



- MudPies Downtown East
- MudPies Downtown
- MudPies King
- MudPies Mocksville

"Providing quality child care for tomorrow's leaders, since 1970!"

NWDC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Incorporated 1971.

★ ★ ★  
★ ★ ★  
**MudPies™**  
★ ★ ★  
★ ★ ★  
**NORTHWEST CHILD-DEVELOPMENT CENTERS**

Phenomenal Teachers + Latest Technology  
Excelling in Kindergarten & Life's Road Ahead

- 336.448.0341 - Downtown East
- 336.725.4772 - Downtown
- 336.983.9698 - King
- 336.751.5298 - Mocksville