

Holbrook teacher finds Rewards in the Classroom

By Denisen Hartlove
The Concordian

Growing up in Springfield, Conn., Carol Wallis' favorite playtime activity was teaching. This spring, the Mt. Diablo School District recognized her lifelong dedication to her craft and honored her with a nomination for the Contra Costa Teacher of the Year award.

Wallis has been with the district since 1991. As a teacher at Holbrook Elementary in Concord, she says her favorite aspect is working with a lesson plan.

"I can teach kids enthusiasm by exciting them with opportunities,"

she said. "I see that the kids are really becoming interested and asking questions by the feedback that goes back and forth from student to teacher."

Wallis started earning a bachelor's degree in education at the American International College in New York. However, after taking one class in education, she shifted her major to psychology. "I wanted a more developmental, psychological aspect," she said of her studies.

She completed a bachelor's in psychology and later obtained a master's in education. Wallis joined the MDUSD after working with special needs children in



Denisen Hartlove/The Concordian
CAROL WALLIS, AN MDUSD TEACHER OF THE YEAR, shows off her student Kalesita Manoa's project on the U.S. Constitution.

New York for 16 years.

Her first position with the dis-

trict was working with Special Day Class students – children she described as having "atypical development." In 1997, she switched to teaching fourth and fifth graders and remains there today.

Wallis said she finds her greatest challenge in her students. "Sometimes you get a kid that it's really hard to spark. I keep trying. I try to find what they're good at and encourage them – work my way into something through their talent."

Students and parents alike share the district's high regard for Wallis. "I believe that Mrs. Wallis deserves the 'Teacher of the Year' award because of her responsibility, organization, control over her class, intelligence, and the way she connects to her students," fifth-grader Deneka Siu, wrote in an email.

Jocelyn Cuesta-Siu, Deneka's mother, also offered praise. "(Wallis) has a way with the children, ensuring that the lessons are learned, but understanding that every child learns differently and at their own pace ... Mrs. Wallis also recognizes that every child has their own gifts and talents and that those gifts should be explored and nurtured."

Wallis said that teaching isn't for the faint of heart. Her advice

Young Dem vies for Central Committee seat with gusto and perseverance

By André Gensburger
The Concordian

Rebecca Barrett is a political dynamo, even at 19 years of age. She is running for the District 4 Democratic Central Committee seat and is determined to surpass the other candidates.

Articulate, poised and well-versed in the issues at hand, Barrett started her foray into the political world at age 14 when she signed up to do phone banking for a recall election.

"It was intimidating at first," Barrett said. But she felt better after a 92-year-old told her that it was because of women taking chances that women secured the right to vote in 1920.

She was involved in mock trials in her sophomore year at Concord High and then joined the International Relief Club, protesting in San Francisco against the displacement camps in Uganda.

"We displaced ourselves from our own homes for 24 hours," Barrett said, "and lived in boxes



André Gensburger/The Concordian
REBECCA BARRETT hopes to attract the young voters in her bid for the District 4 Democratic Central Committee seat.

outside the Cow Palace with only crackers and water to eat and drink. Mostly, it was young people."

Barrett sees her strength as reaching out to young people through mediums like the popular YouTube video format. Much of the work she does is peer to peer networking, spreading the word

wherever possible.

"A lot of young people don't go to the polls because they don't know enough about it," said Barrett, who has garnered much respect for her tenacity and drive.

There are five people running for the two-year Democratic Central Committee position. Four are far older than she, but she plans on the youth vote.

Barrett works as an intern for state Sen. Tom Torlakson's "family office" and has done so since her junior year. She has his endorsement. She plans on going on to St. Mary's College, where she'll major in political science.

"I'd like to say, don't promise what you can't deliver," she said.

According to Barrett, a third of the electorate coming up are young Democrats. "Old politics doesn't relate to them," she said. "It's easier for me to relate to them because I am going through a lot of the same age-related things. We're a diverse group as it is. That's part of growing up – not everybody in your niche is the same."

See Teacher, page 15