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## Multicultural class requires ingenuity

**By George B. Sánchez**

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Sometimes students drive their teacher up the walls. In the case of Anita Raptis, it was up a desk.

Last year, Raptis was trying to teach a Russian student in her third-grade class the word "ledge." She drew a picture on the board, but he didn't get it. She pointed to the ledge on her white board. He still didn't get the concept, much less the word.

So Raptis mounted the desk to show him, and the student finally got it. He shouted the word in Russian and the class applauded him and her for their efforts.

"It's fun," said Raptis, who teaches at Blenman Elementary School. "I like what I do."

Raptis is one of seven local teachers selected for the 2006 Rodel Charitable Foundation of Arizona's Exemplary Teacher Initiative, from a field of 1,000 Tucson teachers. The foundation honors educators who excel in high-poverty schools. The teachers receive \$10,000 in savings bonds and will mentor University of Arizona education seniors for three years.

Raptis' story illustrates her ingenuity as a teacher as well as the reality of her school.

There's a map more than 5 feet tall in the main hallway at Blenman, 1695 N. Country Club Road. Flags mark the countries and regions from which its students hail, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Puerto Rico, the Ukraine and eight African countries.

The reality of a diverse population with a large number of international students, explained Blenman Principal Bobbe Woods, is that teachers need to be adaptable.

"You're not going to walk in and teach the book here," she said.

Last year, students in Raptis' class spoke six languages. She says she's always surprised by the experience her students have had. Refugees, internment camp survivors and even murder witnesses have had desks in her room.

New state and federal standards such as the state's AIMS test and the federal No Child Left Behind Act make an already demanding environment a little frustrating, Raptis said. Acclimating refugee students, bringing them up to speed and expecting them to perform at the level of students who have been with the district for years isn't always realistic, she said. But by no means should teachers give up, she said.

Teachers in this environment, Raptis explained, need to keep their expectations high and give all their students the opportunity to learn because each is just as capable as the other, regardless of individual backgrounds.

Raptis stands as an example of that philosophy, Woods said.

The Star reveals the last of the seven local Rodel winners today. See a full list of winners inside.

**Today's winner:**

Anita Raptis

Age: 42

School: Blenman Elementary

Grade Level: Third

"She creates a structure in her room that allows her students to excel and grow, whether they are native English speakers or learning the language," Woods said.

Rodel winners

**Wednesday's winners:**

Brenda Davis

Age: 43

School: Liberty Elementary

Grade: Kindergarten

Jaime Diaz

Age: 40

School: Walter Douglas Elementary

Grade: Fourth

**Tuesday's winners:**

Kim McDole

Age: 28

School: Helen Keeling Elementary

Grade: Kindergarten

Ross Raderstorf

Age: 49

School: Homer Davis Elementary

Grades: Fifth and sixth

**Monday's winners:**

Margaret Hervert

Age: 49

School: Rio Vista Elementary

Grade: Third

Mary Rodriguez

Age: 49

School: C.E. Rose Elementary

Grade: Kindergarten

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