Written by Darci Tomky

"Neckties were recycled into snake charmers, newspaper and flour made pigs of themselves, while soda can ornaments popped up on Christmas trees."

The Emerald Award nomination letter is clear that Christina Martinez is deserving of the Innovator of the Year Award, as an elementary art teacher who is not afraid to think outside the Crayola crayon box and color outside the lines.

"This innovative teacher has captured the minds and hands of young students while catching the eyes of her counterparts," said nominators Mary Austin, Nancy Kennedy and Cathy Sullivan.

Monsters out of old socks, fish out of music records and piggy banks out of, well, anything the kids could get their hands on. All of these projects used recycled or repurposed items, which helped Martinez stretch the art department budget while getting the kids excited about art. She said the students love when they can bring supplies from home.

"Art was a very tactile experience for me," said Martinez, noting she is most passionate about pottery and other 3-D projects.

She's not afraid to step away from the traditional construction paper and paint to allow her students to recreate mini-sculptures—like Minneapolis' Spoonbridge and Cherry—or get their hands (and the classroom!) completely messy with a clay pottery project.



Elementary art teacher	Christina Martinez teach	es color schemes to	one second-grade
class before			

they dive in to another of her many creative art projects.

—Enterprise photo

"It's totally worth it when the kids get excited about it," she said, noting the students get more and more confident with a medium the more opportunities they get to work with it.

Martinez also teaches students about famous artists and then has them reproduce work in that artist's style.

One of her favorite projects has been creating tea bowls that can be used in a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. Not only was it a lesson in art but a lesson in culture as well. The imperfections in the tea cups are sometimes the best part, said Martinez.

"The hallways and ceilings of Holyoke Elementary School are adorned with ever-changing arrays of student artwork, each one unique in its style and materials," said nominators.

The kids love seeing their work on display, said Martinez. It gives them a sense their work has value. In addition to the hallways, projects are often at display—or on sale—at school music programs. Christmas trees from an art decorating competition were put on display around town, and fabric flower hair accessories were made and sold to raise a little extra money for the art room.

"Her students' enthusiasm for these projects often spills over into after-school work sessions, which Christina unselfishly supervises," said nominators.

Passion for art runs deep

"If I was an art teacher, I could do art every day!"

For a while Martinez wanted to major in technical theater, but since then she's recognized that she has had a passion for art since she was young, and as an art teacher she could create opportunities for other people to like art just as much as she does.

She said she's always been the kind of person that has a desire to teach things to others, a trait strongly influenced by her parents.

Martinez was also impacted by her professors at Minot State University in North Dakota, where she earned a Science of Education degree with a major in art.

"Whenever they introduced a new project, they were so excited about it," she said. "When you're passionate about what you do, it's contagious."

The challenge with elementary art students is intriguing to Martinez, who gets excited about introducing them to the basic principles of art, whether kindergartners are learning to cut and paste or fifth-graders are carefully painting a pottery piece.



Innovator of the	Year Christina	Martinez (at right)	is pictured with	her brother	Anthony
Martinez					

and parents Michael and Lory Martinez.

"Art is mostly about problem-solving skills," said Martinez. They have to come up with a plan for their project, and if something goes wrong, they must come up with ways to adapt.

Art also gives students time away from academics to use creativity and think outside the box. "There's no right answer," said Martinez.

She added elementary art gives kids an outlet when they might not necessarily be good at math or sports. And even in the art room, it's fun for her to see how a student can be terrible at one project and excel in another skill, all in the same subject.

It's a bonus when skills or ideas in art class connect to what the students are learning in their other subjects, like when the second-graders knew exactly what pattern meant because they had just learned it in math.

"I like learning more about teaching. It just makes me a better teacher," said Martinez. She loves going to workshops or getting ideas from YouTube videos online in addition to being closely connected to the other teachers in the elementary school.

In the midst of all of her art projects, Martinez also teaches a daily 90-minute second-grade reading block.

Influence goes beyond walls of the classroom

Art is like life, said Martinez. Sometimes there are serious projects, but sometimes it's fun to do the fun projects too.

"When people ask me to do things, I get so excited about it," she said. "I just love it, though!"

If creative ideas are puzzling other staff members, this art teacher is certainly the go-to person! She's always willing to design a bulletin board, create basketball awards or sculpt a music program prop or backdrop.

Martinez is currently working with Phillips County Extension on their after-school enrichment programs and the 4-H financial literacy program.

This year, Martinez coached Holyoke Elementary's Brain Bowl teams, hosting countless practice rounds in her classroom. She said, "It was fun. I think I was more into it than the kids!"

School events like ESL Night, Title I Parent Academy and the Homework Center are just a few of the other things Martinez volunteers her time for.



Elementary art teacher Christina Martinez takes the risks necessary to improve the craft of educators.

—Enterprise photo

This innovator's New Year's resolution was to become more green, using more repurposed and up-cycled materials in her art projects. She's most certainly accomplished that. Now her next goal this summer is to use more technology.

Martinez researches art projects through other art teachers' blogs, and now she hopes to start a blog of her own—an online treasure chest of art projects that students will have easy access to. With the extensive technology available at Holyoke Elementary, Martinez also hopes to incorporate that more into her classroom in the future.

No matter what crazy idea Martinez comes up with, many people have gone above and beyond to support the art department. "I've been really happy with how the community has embraced the arts," she said. "When you feel supported, you'll be excited."

In their nomination letter, Austin, Kennedy and Sullivan mentioned the old saying that what goes around, comes around. "This adage certainly rings true in Christina's case," they said. "From the re-purposing of found materials for art projects to her generous offers of time and talent, Christina is creating an enriched environment for her students and our community."

Innovator of the Year Christina Martinez



Current position: Elementary Art Teacher and Second-Grade Reading

Education: Douglas High School, Box Elder, S.D. class of 2004; Minot State University, Minot, N.D. class of 2009.

Job experience: I have worked many jobs starting at 10 years old when I was a paper girl. I have worked in food service, on my college campus as student curator for New Bohemia North Dakota Art Exhibition, at Old Navy, at craft shows selling my pottery, at the Ellsworth AFB Arts and Crafts Center and as a substitute teacher for Rapid City and Douglas school districts.

Family: My father and mother, Michael and Lory Martinez, currently live in Millington, Tenn. along with my younger brother Anthony Martinez.

Hobbies: Painting, reading, quilting, hiking, up-cycling, crocheting, walking my doggies, watching movies and traveling.

Community involvement: I try to stay involved with the school as much as I can. This year I have held fund raisers for the art department, coached the Brain Bowl teams and helped out with the Homework Center. I have worked with Mrs. Dalton on building backdrops or props for her programs. I am also working with Tracy Trumper on after school enrichment programs, as well as a financial literacy project with the fourth grade. I just try to help when people need a hand being creative.

Favorite Holyoke school memory: Any time I can get an oooo and awwww out of my students—that never gets old.

Favorite Holyoke memories: My favorite Holyoke memory is getting assigned to chain gang working with Marcia, Kari and John—never a dull moment.

Role models: My greatest role models in my life are my mother and father. My parents have shown me how to fight for what I want and what I believe in, how to "move the rock," how to surround myself with great people and most importantly how to love with all my heart.

Innovator of the Year: Art teacher thinks outside the crayon box Written by Darci Tomky Innovator of the Year: This is open to any employee who has taken a risk to implement some new initiative, program or strategy based on research or evidence of success. The purpose of this award is to demonstrate how we value innovation and risk taking in this district, and that it takes these pioneers in a district to make progress. Holyoke Enterprise April 19, 2012