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New teacher has passion for work in search of light bulb moments

By Sara Samora | The Herald-Zeitung Aug 25, 2019

New Braunfels High School agricultural-welding teacher Pablo Rodriguez. MIKALA COMPTON | Herald-Zeitung

Mikala Compton

Enter Pablo Rodriguez's classroom at New Braunfels High School, and you'll see desks that are not in a straight line, and lockers at the front of the classroom.

"I had this classroom exactly the way I wanted, then I heard I'm going to have more students," Rodriguez said.

It turns out, he will be teaching agricultural welding to an estimated 120 students.

The classroom is small, so taking out the lockers will allow him to have another row of desks.

This is Rodriguez's first year of teaching. Ever.

But he's ready.

Agricultural life

Rodriguez said he grew up in the agriculture, showing a lot of pigs and raising livestock.

"I've always had a passion for the industry, and I've looked up to it, I lived it, and it's something that I really have a passion for," he said. "I'd like to work a lot, and this is what this industry is about, working and being productive."

He's always liked the mechanical side of agriculture — specifically the welding. He said it's more than breaking it down, tearing it apart and putting it back together.

"I think there's a lot of life skills that you learn from it because there's different ways of applying yourself in different situations," Rodriguez said.

He said he had a good welding teacher in high school named Mr. Moses.

"All my ag teachers were great, but it was just different being in his class," Rodriguez. "What was special about him was he was going to show you things you could use in life, you know? He did what he had to do, but he never failed to take that extra step."

The students in Mr. Moses classroom would all pay attention. To this day, Rodriguez said his class is still talked about, years after they left and moved on.

"It's, 'Hey, do you remember Mr. Moses told me that?' or we'll show each other pictures, like 'Look at the welding job I did,' or you know, lifelong lessons that he showed us. That's why I'm here."

He attended community school in Eagle Pass where he grew up, then moved and attended Texas State University in San Marcos, where he earned a degree in agriculture.

Up on the wall to the left, he hung a flag of TSU, with the mascot, representing his school pride.

Eagle Pass

Rodriguez grew up at Eagle Pass, Texas. It's where his work ethic was instilled in him by both his maternal and paternal grandfathers, he said.

"My father was always working, he was always out of town," he said. "So, I was always with my grandparents. My mom raised two kids — I don't want to say by herself, because we got family — but I got much to thank for because everything I know is because of him."

He was taught not to back down from anything.

"That's one thing that I have that I put on my mind, 'We can get it done,'" Rodriguez said.

He grew up near the Rio Grande River, where he went fishing. He also loves to hunt.

By his desk, is a picture hanging on the wall. There's a deer, and behind it, the river. Rodriguez brought it from home and put it up to look over, for when he misses home.

“I look up at it and it just reminds me of being back home,” he said. “It just feels home.”

The kids who don't get much attention

Rodriguez is excited about the kids who will be coming into his class, especially those who don't get all the attention.

“Like the Spanish speakers, I'm excited to reach out to them early on,” he said.

He knows sometimes, when in conversation, he may come across a word he doesn't know how to say English, so he would say it in Spanish.

“Reaching out to those kids, letting them learn where I'm from, and let them know that it's okay to speak Spanish.”

Above the white board is his name carved on burnt wood, made by the seventh grade students at the school he student-taught at.

“At the end of the year they made it for me as a farewell present,” he said.

“The first group of kids I had.”

Advice to and from

Many teachers and staff told Rodriguez the same thing:

“You'll be alright.”

He knows he will.

As for advice to other first-time, first day teachers: work hard and have a passion for it. If you don't, don't do it

"You have try it out because there's going be bad days," Rodriguez said. "I know when I student taught, there were those bad days, and I thought, 'Whoa, maybe this isn't for me.' But at the end of the day, seeing that light bulb click on somebody to where it's like they understood, is priceless."



Two Comal ISD graduates return to district as first-year teachers

