

Kyrene vol wins early-childhood award

When her story appeared on these pages around this time last year, Sharyn Weinheimer already had been hailed as a champion of volunteer efforts to recognize the value of aiming kids toward education even before they start school.

Now Weinheimer, a veteran volunteer with the group First Things First, has one more accolade recognizing her efforts: She's the recipient of the organization's 2020 First Things First East Maricopa Regional Champion for Young Children. The award is given to local champions who actively offer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health.

Champions are said to spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.

Weinheimer, according to a Kyrene School District announcement, says she believes in her cause and promotes it whenever she has an opportunity. "I feel strongly about setting up children

for success by making sure early childhood development and health are the focus," said Weinheimer, who is a National Board Certified Teacher.

"Early literacy is the most important indicator of a child's readiness for school. Early literacy development complements the current academic research, which supports the critical role of early experiences in shaping brain development.

"My mission is to share with families the importance of reading, talking and singing with your child can set them up for a life of success."

Weinheimer, who is a multi-tiered systems-of-support coordinator for the Kyrene district, uses FTF's early literacy information in the district office lobby to engage visitors, who range from school board members to staff to parents.

She also is said to have used FTF's early childhood information during interactive workshops about dialogic reading, where the adult engages the child in the storytelling.

Information: firstthingsfirst.org/regions/find-your-region.

MCC grad a \$10k winner for work to ease student-debt

Students from Mesa Community College have received the top prize in an Up to Us National College Competition for their team's efforts to raise awareness of the national debt in relationship to America's fiscal problems.

MCC is the first community college in the eight-year history of the award to receive the recognition.

The team, led by MCC 2020 graduate Shelby Lynch, developed a multi-faceted campaign focused on raising awareness about the national debt and providing the foundation for a dialogue on building a sustainable economic future for all Americans.

The team engaged with fellow students during the fall 2019 semester through a series of targeted events, awareness surveys, classroom presentations, campus partnerships, engagement with college administrators and the deployment of impactful social media content.

"My teammates and I joined the Up to Us Campus Competition to spark a dialogue on campus about the very real consequences that the national debt could have on our future, and the importance of fiscal sustainability," said Lynch.

"We focused on making the national


debt more relatable to members of our generation by incorporating activities that appeal to our peers – games, interactive tabling activities, nonpartisan political parody and social media sharing."

Judges noted that the team's events included a Halloween-themed "National Debt House of Horrors" that introduced students to "scary" facts about the national debt through collaborations with campus clubs and departments.


The team also hosted a national debt trivia event in partnership with Brian Dille, Ph.D., an MCC political science professor. The team produced and performed a satirical skit of the world in 2032 if the national debt continues to skyrocket, followed by a discussion about the potential consequences for young people.

Lynch and team members Aaron Millett, Mitchell Stewart, Gabriel Castaneda, Landon Kea and Bailee Shupe joined students from teams from across the country in a series of national virtual events in May, where their efforts were recognized.

The team received a \$10,000 cash prize supporting the continuation of its efforts for the next academic year.



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