

THE DEFENDER

San Marcos Educators Association Newsletter



<https://www.sanmarcosteachers.org/>



Message from the President...

Dear Colleagues,

We are dedicating this newsletter to the memory of John Morello, who passed away peacefully on February 1st, 2024. John was part of the fabric of SMEA serving for many years as our Bargaining and Grievance Chair. He worked for SMUSD for 41 years, had a heart of gold, and fought for all of our rights. An advocate for labor and students alike, I remember many of the conversations I had with him, especially when I first became president, that truly gave me the confidence I needed to be able to take on this role. Recently, under the recommendation of SMEA's executive board, SMEA's Rep council voted to change the name of our scholarship to honor John. It is now named *The San Marcos Educators' Association John Morello Memorial Scholarship*. Although John will be missed dearly, his legacy will live on forever.

Sincerely,
Dale Pluciennik
SMEA President



John Morello Obituary

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In Honor of John Morello

Educator, advocate, mentor, friend. These are the words that come to mind when I think of John Morello. When you first meet John, he has this hard ass, football coach, ex-marine exterior. But once you get to know him you find that he's really this teddy bear type of man with a heart of gold.

John was the fighting spirit of our teacher's union, the San Marcos Educators Association. But he was always the compassionate soul for his teachers. He often said how helping teachers brought him joy in life. But if he was focused on a perceived injustice to one of the people he represented, beware of the fury he was going to bring.

Early on as President, John said some words to me that stuck to this day. He said, "Michael, it's amazing what you can get accomplished when you don't care who is going to get credit for it". And these words characterized his work as a champion for his fellow educators. He also had another memorable phrase that helped describe his zest for life. In a conversation about a debate whether to make an expensive purchase or take a vacation, John said "You know, it's only earth dollars. You can't take it with you." And that carefree attitude also defined this man.

I will miss my friend and mentor. I will miss our conversations about how to do better for the educators we represented. I will miss discussing sports, family, and current events. But mostly I will miss knowing that someone of his character exists in this world, and I was lucky enough to call him my friend.

~Michael DeVries, former SMEA President

In Honor of John Morello

John Morello was a force and I'm so happy that our two paths crossed on this Earth. John's knowledge, dedication to work and our union, and kindness will forever be remembered. John left a great legacy here in San Marcos.

~ Marla Rosenthal
SMEA Social Media

John was a great mentor to me when I joined San Marcos High School. He was a large man who could seem intimidating at first, but all who got to know him quickly realized he had a heart of gold. As a teacher, he cared about his students. As a coach, he cared about his players. As a union leader, he cared about the members of our San Marcos community. I learned a lot from him in all these areas he served, and I am grateful for the time I had under his wing. I will always remember how he always kept things in perspective and truly listened and showed compassion to those he interacted with. John was a good man, and I will miss him.

~Robert Gordon
SMEA Treasurer





John Morello ~Damon Gidner/SMEA Bargaining & Grievance

John Morello believed in the value of public education! He was an advocate for students and understood the crucial role in providing equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status. He loved being a teacher and mentor to the youth. He found it incredibly fulfilling to make a positive impact on students' lives and help shape the future generation.

I first met John Morello my freshman year of high school. As I walked into 5th period Biology, he stood in front of me with his golf polo and khakis. He had a big smile on his face as he welcomed a new class of wide eyed freshmen. Little did I know then, that one day he would be my colleague in San Marcos Unified School District and mentor in SMEA.

Soon after becoming a teacher in San Marcos Unified School District, I also became a site rep for my school. I attended my first rep council and ran into John once again. I recognized him right away as he hadn't changed much over the years. After the meeting I re-introduced myself to him and explained that I had been his student at one time. He was so excited that I was now a teacher and becoming involved in SMEA. He told me about his role in SMEA and how I should stay involved because what they were doing was so important to the teaching profession.

I stayed involved as a site rep for a few years and eventually I joined the executive board of SMEA. During my time as the Corresponding Secretary for SMEA, I was able to work with John more and see his other passion... fighting for employees' rights! John was a huge advocate of treating ALL employees fairly, equally, and respectfully. Later, when I joined the bargaining team, John, who was the lead negotiator, shared his infinite knowledge and beliefs regarding employee rights with me. You could hear his passion in his voice and his conviction in his actions....John was sincere about fighting for the rights of teachers and other members of SMEA.

I spent over ten years learning from John all about bargaining and working within a contract. He taught me about analyzing contract language and writing new language that would protect employees. We spent many hours discussing and strategizing ways to improve working conditions within our bargaining unit, as well as building relationships with the district. I was able to witness first hand how John approached working with the district to help the various strands of our association. He was able to be firm, yet respectful, in his interactions and always had the best interest of the employee(s) in mind.

I feel fortunate to have worked with John for many years. He taught me so much about what it means to be a strong union member and how to advocate for all employees. As I now sit in the position once held by John, I can reflect upon just how impactful our relationship had been. His perspective and wisdom are something that I carry with me on a daily basis. There are multiple times that I have reflected on his words and thought about what he would do in the situation. My goal has always been to honor his memory by applying his teachings, along with forging my own path and developing my own style and perspective. I would like to believe that his legacy lives on through all of us! We all owe John a piece of gratitude for not only being a tremendous teacher, but for helping to shape SMEA into the strong union it is today.



Our association is deeply affected by John Morello's recent passing as we grieve the loss of a passionate supporter of educators and students. I cannot help but think back to how dedicated he was to both SMEA and the classroom. For me, John was more than just a coworker; he was a mentor and a person whom I greatly respected and admired.

John's mentorship was a catalyst for my own growth and development within the association. His ability to navigate the complexities of advocacy with an unwavering determination served as a blueprint for my own endeavors. Through his guidance and support, John helped me to find my voice so that I could help those within our association. Whether it was providing advice, sharing valuable insights, or simply being a sounding board, John's mentorship was instrumental in nurturing my passion for advocating on behalf of teachers within SMEA.

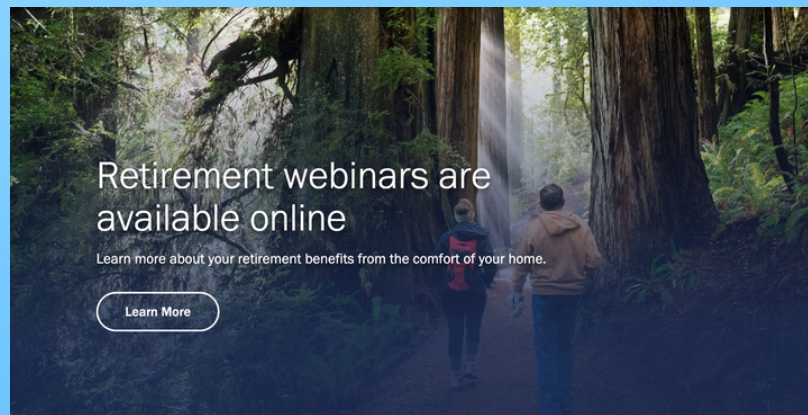
I have some very fond memories of John. My earliest memory of him was when I was a student at SMHS, and even though I was not in his class, he knew who I was. I think this speaks to the type of person John was. He was truly interested in others. I still recall talking to him outside of my old room when I decided to run for a position on the Executive Board and the support and encouragement that he gave me over that decision. This sums up John to me. It was always about people and supporting those who do this job. John you will be missed.

~Micheal Sterling
SMEA Membership

Resources



CALSTRS Retirement Webinars



CalSTRS offers webinars designed for all stages of your career. Communicating virtually is now more important than ever. Register today so you can plan ahead by better understanding your CalSTRS benefits. These are live webinars, and you will have an opportunity to ask questions.

You must use a current browser to register for a webinar.

After you register for a webinar, a registration confirmation email will be sent to you. If you do not receive an email, check your spam folder.

OK GO MUSIC Inspired STEAM Lessons K-12

Mental Health Awareness

Here are some very useful links pertaining to mental health awareness. Check out all of [VEBA's new online mental and behavioral health resources](#).