

Inside Our Schools by Amy Moellering

By Amy Moellering VALLEY TIMES

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Like Clark Kent going undercover to get the scoop so he can save the world as Superman, Terry Greenway and Nicole Gorin have entered the workplace this summer so they can be super science teachers during the year.

Greenway teaches at Jackson Elementary and Gorin at Christensen Middle School, both in Livermore. Both have summer fellowships through Industry Initiatives for Science and Math Education. Greenway is working at the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital in Palo Alto and Gorin works in the environmental health and safety department at Dow Chemical in Pittsburg.

Both of these committed teachers are gaining experience and inspiration which they will share with their students and schools this fall.

The program began in 1985 when 13 leaders of major corporations, including Lockheed Martin, Hewlett Packard and IBM,

became concerned about the quality of education, specifically in math and science. They realized the main factor in creating quality education is the teacher. Leveraging their resources, they created summer fellowships to inspire high school teachers by exposing them to real-world applications of the science and math they teach.

So far, 1,351 teachers have taken the fellowships. This program has been so successful that it has been expanded to include teachers of all subjects and all grade levels — elementary school through college.

"We realized that many kids are turned off to math and science in middle school and that many teachers ... are teaching in an abstract way," said the program's executive director, Jennifer Bruckner. This summer, there are 178 teachers from seven different counties in the program — including 30 teachers from Alameda and seven from Contra Costa counties.

"It really makes a lot of sense," said Bruckner. "A lot of teachers don't have any experience outside of academia. This program, by matching them with a business, exposes them to their subject in the workplace."

Bruckner's job of matching teachers and jobs is a bit like a dating service. First, teachers apply online for the fellowships. They must meet certain requirements, such as two years teaching experience, a contract in place for the following school year and a commitment to at least three more years of teaching.

Teachers can review the opportunities online and can specify what skills and positions they are interested in. In the end, however, it is the business sponsor who makes the final decision, matching a teacher's skills to the company's mission and culture.

Each teacher is assigned a veteran teacher coach to help them develop a plan to incorporate their experience to the classroom. Teachers also meet weekly in community peer groups to share ideas.

Gorin's summer fellowship at Dow has not only given her experience analyzing survey data and updating Web sites, but she has also worked with the safety team to brainstorm ideas for a hazard awareness program.

"From this experience, I've been inspired to make safety a more visible topic on campus," said Gorin.

Greenway's work of compiling an annual report for nurses has given him insight into organizational structures.

"I have adapted this configuration to my school setting so that teachers can more easily assume ownership of our newly written school vision," he said.

"More teachers could benefit from this program if more companies participated," said Bruckner. "We are eager to bring in new sponsors." Although large companies, such as Lockheed, are able to sponsor 20 teachers a summer, smaller startup companies also contribute with one to two sponsorships a summer.

"(The) summer fellowship program provides a needed link between the classroom, where our future generation is being educated, and their potential job market," said Gorin. "As a teacher, it provides me the opportunity to observe firsthand the skills that my students will need to be successful."

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