By Aracely Ortega

In the summer of 2012, Union City High School special needs and geometry instructor Ms. Alcantara used her education, compassion and teaching skills to benefit the less fortunate. While collaborating with International Volunteers HQ, a program that provides aid through education and supplies to countries in need, Ms. Alcantara was able to assist residents in Peru, the country where her family resides.

“This is something that I’ve been wanting to do for a very long time, I’ve been researching and investigating programs that are not only safe but reliable, so finding that International Volunteers offered a program in Peru was perfect.”

After being given the option of where and how she wished to volunteer Ms. Alcantara chose what she felt most comfortable doing: teaching.

“When I started teaching I felt great, the program in which I worked gave volunteers many choices as to whether they wanted to work with teenagers or in the orphanages. There are different types of orphanages, there are those for kids who were given up for adoption, and then there’s the orphanage, for kids with special needs, which resembles a hospital because the kids are incapable of moving their arms or performing everyday tasks.”

“Volunteering in Peru was bittersweet due to the conditions of the kids, I felt great doing it, but at the same time it was truly sad to see the parents abandoning the children. You can see the suffering in the kids’ faces.”

Ms. Alcantara mentioned the poor conditions of the area while staying in Lima. It was common for children to make their own toys instead of purchasing them.

“While in Peru I would work with a lot of teenage girls who were often abandoned or neglected by their parents and you would notice that they needed you. As soon as I was introduced to them they told me their life stories and I would feel compassionate toward the girls because they trusted in me so much.”

Although the trip was bittersweet for Ms. Alcantara, she emphasized how much of a learning experience it was for her. The comparison of teaching for a summer in Peru and in Union City High School allowed her to deliver a powerful message to her kids and students.

“Ever since the trip I’ve been telling my kids to appreciate everything they have, and to be grateful for everything they are given. I sympathize for those in Peru because they definitely do not deserve to be in the situation in which they were placed.”

“I would strongly recommend this program to others because it has showed me to be patient and flexible, this program was surely an experience. Others should consider volunteering as well.”

Ms. Alcantara, at her own expense, will be returning to Peru this summer.

On April 23, 2013 Union City High School, held its second annual Sage Awards which are intended to recognize and celebrate UCHS staff members who have positively supported students and impacted their lives throughout high school. It is notable that the vast majority of the student body in Union City High School, have come to recognize staff members who have made a remarkable difference throughout their high school career.

The sage awards commenced the previous year. At the time, Mr. Addas introduced the idea and, along with the rest of the student recognition committee, which consisted of Mr. Lewis, Ms. Metzger, Ms. Enrico, Ms. Vanderhorst, Ms. Centeno and Ms. Ortiz, carried it out successfully.

“There was a lot of feedback, it was exciting to see student’s enthusiasm and support,” Ms. Metzger said of the reaction of students who participated during the first Sage Awards. Even
now, students were still ecstatic to nominate and personally award a staff member.

The nomination process is as follows: members of the student recognition committee visit each English class and elaborate on how students can recommend. Participants must submit their emails. Later on, an email containing a survey is sent to each student. Students are required to answer questions that showcase their bond with the staff member. The main question is "How has this person impacted your academic, personal, or social growth?"

The committee draws its final decision on a nominee by choosing the most captivating responses. The chosen student has the option to introduce and present a speech during the awards. There are no limitations on departments either.

The ceremony had a tone of excitement and joy. The dining hall held a total of 37 Sage Award Recipients and 52 student presenters. Staff members were notably eager to discover the student who had nominated them.

Many smiles and hugs were exchanged between staff and students. One junior, Ana Sofia Trelles, spoke fondly of an English teacher, Ms. Piental. "There are many great teachers yet Ms. Piental.

and I have a strong connection. Not only academically but personally. She will always support me, she's an inspiration, making my dreams in becoming a writer come true."

Ms. Piental was very honored and deeply touched. "I've known Ana Sofia for two years now. Sometimes it's difficult to get to know a student during a small amount of time during the day yet sometimes a single connection can happen. Ana has a passion for writing therefore it was simple to connect with her due to common interests. It's amazing to see a student for who they are besides a 'student.'

Senior, Victor Gomez had also shared his thoughts on nominating, Italian teacher, Mr. Brembos. "He is very inspirational and has a great sense of humor. Not only that, but he has helped with my future plans. Mr. Brembos has also taught members of my family so our connection goes way back."

Award winning history teacher, Mr. Emmerling admires the idea of the ceremonies. "Teachers, like students, need periodic reinforcement on assurance that they are doing a great job. It's nice to get feedback from students. This gives students a chance to be stakeholders within our building."

Ceremonies like these demonstrate how great staff members are here at UCHS.

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don’t think a possession of a gun is necessary. That is why we have police officers to protect our town, state, and country. If people own guns, then what is the job of police officers? Having a gun in one’s home can cause more harm and violent actions. Although regulations have been made, violence has still not been solved. There have been many instances where guns have been the cause of problems. If we were to eliminate ownership of guns, this would lower crime rates and hopefully improve our community.”

Contrary to her opinion, another senior, Vanessa Lopez taking Constitutional Law rebutted Pichardo’s opinion by saying “I think the ownership of a gun is necessary because you do have to protect yourself from criminals who try to do you harm. True we do have police officers; but do they show up in a blink of an eye? If someone were to cause intentional harm, you have the right to defend yourself before the police arrive. Lastly, there shouldn’t be rules and regulations on whether I want to have a weapon or not. The expenses to purchase a gun are coming out of my own pocket: the Second Amendment clearly states that my right to bear arms cannot be infringed.”

Just like these two students, there are more people nationwide who can identify with one of these views. After the incident in Newtown Cn. school, President Barack Obama was quoted by CNN, about ownership of guns and regulations: “We can respect the Second Amendment while keeping an irresponsible law-breaking few from inflicting harm on a massive scale.”

This debate on the Second Amendment is something that will not get resolved in a matter of just weeks. Recently the Senate fell six votes short of passing a resolution requiring background checks for people wanting to buy firearms and closing a gun show loophole that bypassed waiting periods. Although polls across the country showed an overwhelming number of Americans supported the resolution—Gallup registered an 83 percent approval rating in April according to US News & World Report—“the NRA and other groups let their displeasure with the restrictions known to senators. No regulations would have prevented a tragedy when a five-year-old boy shot his sister with a Cricket Gun, advertised as “My First Rifle.” In a statement that shocks people advocating gun control, County Judge-Executive John A. Phelps Jr said to NPR “Learning how to use a gun at a young age has been common for generations in rural Kentucky.”

In the wake of stories of mass shootings and stories of people using guns to defend themselves and their families during robberies or home invasions, the fact that Congress and the president cannot come together to address the issue can have lethal consequences.
Art work and more than 50 student performances generated from all of Union City's schools captivated the crowds that attended this year's two-day Multi Arts Festival, which has exceeded a 30 year run.