

# Carlos Commentary: Fontana teachers, students honored by Vista Metals

By AMANDA CARLOS

Published: Thursday, May 20, 2010 2:29 PM CDT

Fontana is home to the largest independent producer of “specialty aluminum products” in the world thanks to the Vista Metals Corp.

Vista Metals has been around since 1968, extending its services from a local to an international scale.

According to the company’s website, “Vista Metals’ production processes include the recycling of industrial scrap aluminum as well as the utilization of various grades of primary aluminum, which collectively produce high quality, competitively priced aluminum alloy products.”

As mentioned before, the Fontana business has been able to become a world-wide success, and as a result enjoy sharing that success with the city.

For the past four years, Vista Metals has been honoring Fontana’s high school teachers and students who in turn make major contributions to our community.

Vista Metals offers grants to four students and four teachers — one from every high school — so that all the recipients can further their educational pursuits with some extra financial help.

The lucky recipients had to submit an application and write an essay about the various efforts they have made to better our community. After all applications are in, a panel of judges read each essay and finally select one teacher and one student from our (now) four high schools.

From Summit, both Duran Valdez (AP Government/US History teacher) and his AP Government student, Carley Haro, were awarded the grants.

At the high school level, both senior students and teachers are alerted each year about different grant/scholarship opportunities to either benefit their work in the classroom and/or further their education.

“I was motivated to apply because I felt like I had a very real, very meaningful, contribution to teaching at Summit High School. I thought I had helped make some changes that had led to concrete results and I wanted my department and I to get recognition for that,” Valdez commented.

He further explained the details of his award-winning essay: “I wrote about how last year and this year I made a big effort to get U.S. History teachers to meet up, create common assessments,

and share resources and lesson plan ideas. World History got hot on it as well a month or two later. After we did this, our test scores in our department shot up by a lot, and we basically doubled the number of students who got Advanced scores on the CSTs, increased the percent that were Proficient, and vastly decreased the number of kids scoring far below basic and basic. Our primary way of helping the community is by making sure that their children are learning, and we did this in a way that was measurable and showed significant improvement.”

Because of his determination to both improve teaching and learning within the History Department, Vista Metals felt Valdez was worthy of the award.

But he did want to mention that this was “possible because the other teachers were open-minded, supportive, and collaborative.”

Coincidentally, a student in his AP Government class also wrote an award-winning essay. Senior Carley Haro has a lot to be proud of, for it seems that every award/grant she has applied for throughout the course of her senior year, she has won.

The Vista Metals grant application was no exception. Valdez had the honor of informing Haro about her recent achievement. He said, “Carley was excited — In fact, she’s written so many different essays that she needed a lot of clarification before she even knew which award I was referring to.”

On May 13, Vista Metals held its fourth annual awards banquet at Etiwanda Gardens, where both Valdez and Haro received a check and a trophy.

Winners from other Fontana schools were:

Fontana A.B. Miller High School:

Teacher - Julie Orrison-Myrehn

Student - Desiree Outten-Berrios

Fontana High School:

Teacher - Mary Ann Belmontez

Student - Angela Perez

Kaiser High School:

Teacher - Becky Johnson

Student - Mariah Sandoval

Congratulations to Summit's winners and to all the other high school teachers and students who received awards as well that night.

(Amanda Carlos is a teacher at Summit High School. She writes a column on a weekly basis for the Herald News.)