

ECISD earns honors in fossil art contest

BY RUTH CAMPBELL

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On several levels, Ector County ISD had a good showing **in** its first effort to take part **in** National **Fossil Day Art contest**. The National Park Service and National **Fossil Day** partners sponsored the **art contest** to celebrate the 11th annual National **Fossil Day**. The 2020 National **Fossil Day** celebration was scheduled for Oct. 14 during Earth Science Week, the NPS website said. The theme for this year's **contest** was "Life of the Paleozoic Oceans!" "For this theme we would like **contest** participants depict aquatic organisms from the Paleozoic oceans, particularly those found **in** the United States of America. The Paleozoic era (541 to 250 million years ago) was the earliest of the three geologic eras with diverse life, and is subdivided into six geologic periods: the Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Carboniferous, and Permian," the site said.

The 2020 National **Fossil Day** logo featured a variety of sea creatures that formed and lived within a 270 million year old Permian Reef from the Glass Mountains and Guadalupe Mountains of Texas and New Mexico, the site said. Cavazos Elementary School fifth-grader Yadiel Duarte, 10, and Burleson Elementary School kindergarten bilingual teacher Melissa Hernandez earned national honorable mention. Duarte also was the grade and district-level winner.

He said he was very excited about winning the **contest** and has always enjoyed drawing. Duarte said it's fun to discover things about dinosaurs and searched for images to draw online. He said he created the drawing **in** pencil and it took him a few days.

ECISD Innovation Instructional Specialist Mary Fulton said this is the first year the district has participated **in** the national **fossil art contest**. Fulton said she appreciates that campuses were able to make time to take part **in** the midst of COVID-19 and other things.

"Ofcoursenextyearwe're hoping for bigger and better," Fulton said.

She added that it's beneficial for students anytime you can make learning relate to the real world.

"That's our goal is to ignite that curiosity and discovery and make it engaging and fun for those kiddos," Fulton said.

Hernandez said she started her piece **in** pencil and then added pen and oil pastels. She earned a degree **in** multidisciplinary studies and a minor **in** geology.

"**In** college, I was really interested **in** geology and paleontology and I did take some classes. It has always been a passion of mine and I started looking into the National **Fossil Day** ...," Hernandez said.

Her drawing was of two ammonites, which she said are part of the Permian Sea.

She found out by checking her phone that she'd gotten honorable mention.

"I was (scrolling) down my phone. My first thought was I didn't get anything, but I went to the very, very end and there was my drawing, so I got super excited and I ran to tell my brother and tell my mom, basically everyone," Hernandez said.

Born **in** Texas, Hernandez said she grew up **in** Mexico and spent her high school years **in** Florida. "It was when I entered college that I moved here to Odessa. That has been around seven years that I've lived here," she said.

She added that to this day, her mother sends her pictures of her artwork from kindergarten.

“I’ve always liked drawing and ... for a while I didn’t pursue that hobby, but after I started working with kids and after college ... I started drawing more. I’m still getting better. (There’s) still a lot to learn,” Hernandez said.

She said she was honored and surprised that she’d been recognized “because, like I said, I was not expecting it.”

“I did it like a fun thing to do. I know my skills are not as advanced as some of the participants, but it was a great honor to have that honorable mention,” Hernandez said.

She added that she really enjoys teaching kindergarten and that her mother was a teacher, as well, so she has to thank her for pushing her **in** that direction.

Her students didn’t understand how big a deal it was that she’d been recognized. “But they were pretty excited the day the Innovation Department gave me the medal. They were super excited. Honestly, every time we draw or something, they try to imitate me. They want to be as good ...,” Hernandez said.

She added that she tries to set a positive example for her students and encourage them not to put limits on themselves.

“Sometimes we put limits on ourselves that shouldn’t be. I try to have that mentality with them,” Hernandez said.

She added that she’s glad to work with amazing people like the Innovation Department and with her colleagues at Burleson.

“I have a lot of great coworkers that always support me,” Hernandez said.

Other winners are: >> Second grade, Sam Houston Elementary, Cydnee Perry.

>> Third grade, Nolan Bright, Milam Elementary.

>> Eighth grade, Josighiah Bright, Bonham Middle School.

>> 10th grade, Chloe Acosta, George H.W. Bush New Tech Odessa.

The judges were: Michael Zavada, University of Texas Permian Basin; Amy Kim, UTPB; Mara Bland, Petroleum Museum; Annie Stanley, Ellen Noel **Art** Museum; and Chris Stanley, UTPB.



ECISD Innovation Instructional Specialist Mary Fulton places a medal around the neck of Cavazos Elementary fifth grade student Yadiel Duarte. Duarte, 10, was the grade and district level winner for people **in**

his age bracket and earned national honorable mention.

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