

Wanting the best

Theresa Tall named Piney Grove Elementary School Teacher of the Year

BY JENNIFER OWENSBY EMINGER
Lifestyles Editor

When Theresa Tall learned she had been named Teacher of the Year at Piney Grove Elementary School (PGES), she was humbled.

"I am grateful to work with a group of outstanding people, so for them to choose me is humbling," she said, adding that the announcement came over the school's intercom.

Tall grew up in Sulphur, Louisiana in a family with seven children, which she joked had prepared her to be a teacher.

"As you can imagine, my environment was loud and chaotic," she said.

Growing up, Tall said she didn't see herself becoming an educator, but instead was interested in pursuing a career in horticulture as she loves to spend time gardening and being outside. However, while running a home daycare as an adult, she found herself eagerly waiting for her afterschool students so she could help them with schoolwork.

"It was then that I decided to begin a career in education," she

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said.

Having a husband who served in the Marine Corps, Tall lived in Jacksonville, NC at the time and later moved to Albany, Georgia where she graduated from Darton College with her associate's degree in education. She and her family then moved to Okinawa, Japan, where she graduated from Western Governors University with her undergraduate degree in education.

"We left Japan in May 2007 and moved to Kernersville," she said. "I was grateful to be given the opportunity to teach fourth grade at Piney Grove in the same year."

Tall said her husband's service in the Marine Corps provided her family the opportunity to travel and have many experiences. She noted that he retired after 22 years of service.

Tall has been teaching fourth grade at PGES since she moved to Kernersville in 2007.

Tall said she likes trying new things and using different styles of learning to reach her students.

"I like to try new things and evolve as education evolves," she said. "If I have an opportunity to use technology or provide a hands-on lesson, I will. I encourage students to problem solve, to work together, and to not be afraid to make mistakes."

She added that her favorite lesson is in animal

studies, teaching students about animal adaptations.

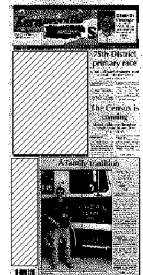
"I enjoyed watching the students create habitats for the frogs, crabs, and millipedes. Students have mixed feelings about the animals, and I enjoy watching them step out of their comfort zones and take chances to interact," she said. "Now, students enjoy these lessons in their science specials. I still enjoy going in and watching them learn when they are putting together habitats."

Tall said she also enjoys watching her students collaborate during a small group novel or text.

"It is great to see them share their understanding of ideas and help each other through tough material," she said. "I like being silly in the classroom and making the kids laugh when possible."

When asked to share a funny moment from her classroom, Tall recalled one that recently happened.

"Each year students call me mom at one point or another. It's completely understandable because they are comfortable and involved in their work, which is how I know I've created a safe environment for them," she said. "Several weeks ago, while students were engaged in an activity, I hear, 'Hey Siri, I mean Mrs. Tall.' I stopped and said, 'Did you seriously just call me Siri?' Of course, this was followed by lots of laughter and is now at the top of my funny memory list."



After the year ends and students move on, Tall hopes they remember that she wanted them to be their best.

“My teaching style has changed through the years. Depending on the generation, I’m sure they would have various responses,” she said. “Out of all the things they might say, such as strict, funny, animated, or encouraging, I hope they know I truly wanted them to be their best.”

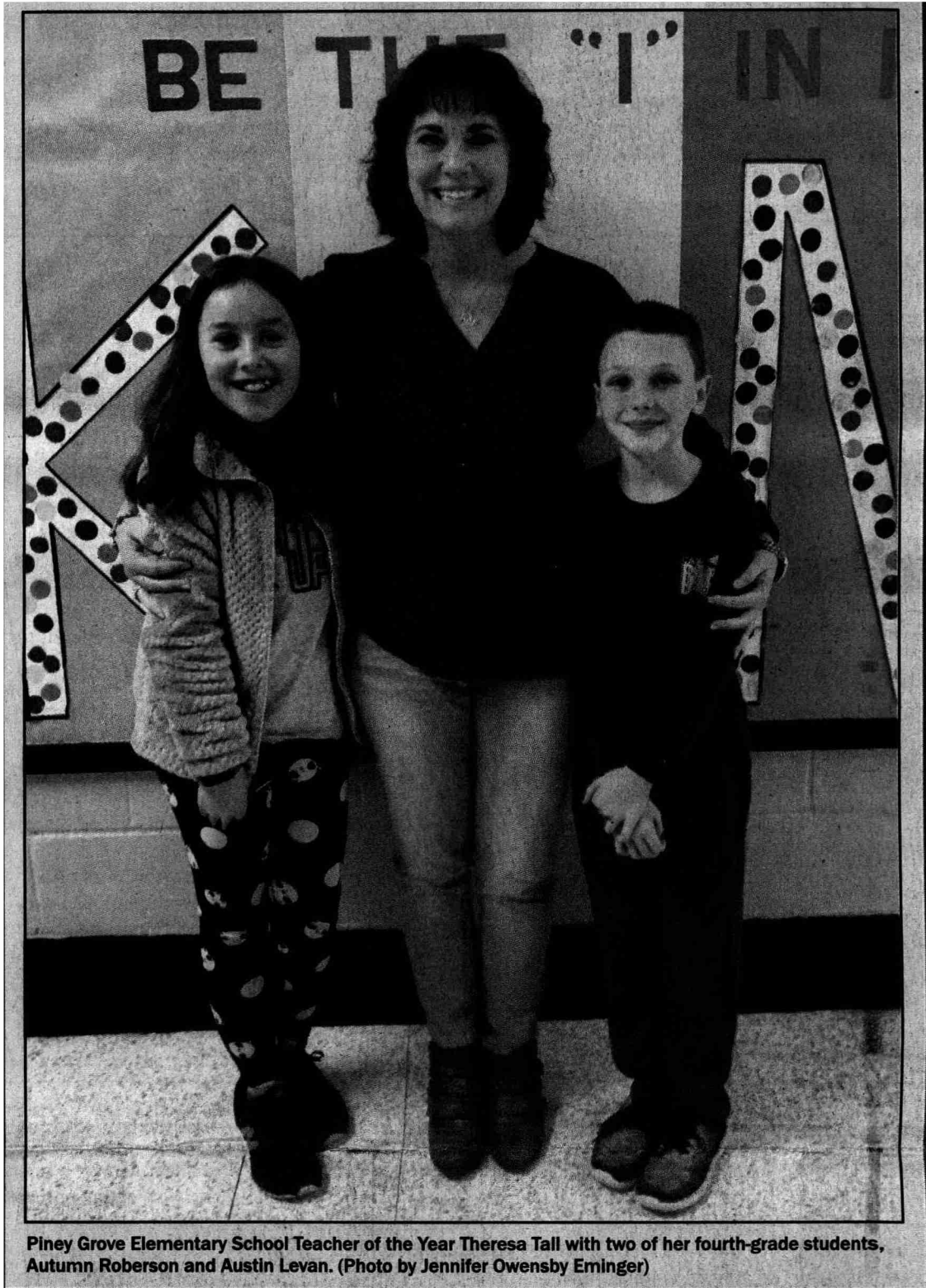
When she isn’t teaching, Tall said she enjoys being outside.

“In the warmer months, I’m happy reading a book in my pool or in my garden. I find planting flowers and working with my butterfly garden very therapeutic,” she said.

She and her husband have two daughters, Ha-leigh and Raven, and two grandsons, Bryson and Kolt.



Theresa Tall



Piney Grove Elementary School Teacher of the Year Theresa Tall with two of her fourth-grade students, Autumn Roberson and Austin Levan. (Photo by Jennifer Owensby Eminger)