



Making Connections: A Profile of 2008-2009 School Outreach Winner Margarita Griggs

By Lillian Clementi

This year's ATA School Outreach Award went to Margarita Griggs, a translator and interpreter based in Reno, Nevada.

Diverse Group

Margarita's winning photograph highlighted her May 2009 School Outreach presentation to ESL (English as a Second Language) students at Reed High School in Sparks, Nevada—a diverse group that included young people with roots in Thailand, China, Korea, the Philippines, India, Mexico, and Honduras. “Both the students and the teacher were eager to learn about translation and interpreting. They gave me a full 75 minutes of class time,” Margarita recalled.

Margarita began her presentation by emphasizing the importance of communication around the world, then briefly highlighted the role of translation in fostering knowledge and culture throughout history. She went on to explain the difference between translation and interpreting and point out that being bilingual is only the beginning. “I stressed that translation and interpreting are specialized professions,” she said.

Attentive and Interested

“The students were very attentive and interested in the profession,” Margarita said. “I run a language bank, and some of the students have already told me that they want to get started in interpreting! I said I couldn't take them until they had

gotten an education—they had to go to school, study translation and/or interpreting, and get a degree.”

“As a closing exercise, I asked the students which word best described what they had learned: they chose *connect*, and then translated the word into the language of their country of origin.”

Connecting Schools to Students and Parents

Margarita works as an interpreter and translation specialist for Reno's Washoe County School District. With Hispanics accounting for 33.4% of the student body, she stays busy providing English and Spanish material for virtually every aspect of the school district's operations, enabling teachers and school officials to communicate effectively with parents and the broader community. In the course of her work, Margarita has translated and created materials ranging from school bus rules and informational videos to bilingual manuals for a variety of departments. She also trains and supervises some 40 contract interpreters who serve the school district as needed.

One especially rewarding aspect of Margarita's work is training bilingual school personnel—from teachers to clerks—to interpret for non-English-speaking parents and for the students in Washoe County School District's Special Education Program. “Training is required for every bilingual employee,” she says. “They know the



2008-2009 School Outreach winner Margarita Griggs (top row, third from right) spoke to a diverse group of English as a Second Language students at Reed High School in Sparks, Nevada.

language: I teach them the craft of interpreting and all that it involves.”

Margarita has also helped the school district build strong relationships with the local community by producing a number of Spanish-language handbooks for parents. Her work product also includes public announcements, news releases, and special presentations in both Spanish and English.

Pressed into Service

Margarita began translating and interpreting in 1987, when she moved to Reno and joined Washoe County School District’s ESL Office, where she worked with the Migrant Program. Pressed into service as a translator and interpreter because she was bilingual, she soon resolved to go back to school. “I realized right away that I needed continuing education! I took all the translation classes they

As a closing exercise, I asked the students which word best described what they had learned that day. They chose *connect*.

had.” As she continued to work for the school district, she earned a BA and an MA in foreign languages and literature in Spanish from the University of Nevada, Reno. “In 1999, I told the superintendent that the office needed a full-time translator,” Margarita recalls. “By then I had the training I needed. They offered me the job, and I took it.”

In 2005, Reno’s Truckee Meadows Community College offered her a job teaching translation, and she accepted—on the condition that she

would have the latitude to develop her own course material. The college agreed, and Margarita prepared a syllabus and material for the course. She now spends many evenings and Saturdays at Truckee Meadows, teaching her own translation certificate class and an academic Spanish course.

Connecting with Colleagues and Family

As winner of the 2008-2009 School Outreach Contest, Margarita received free registration to ATA’s 50th ➡

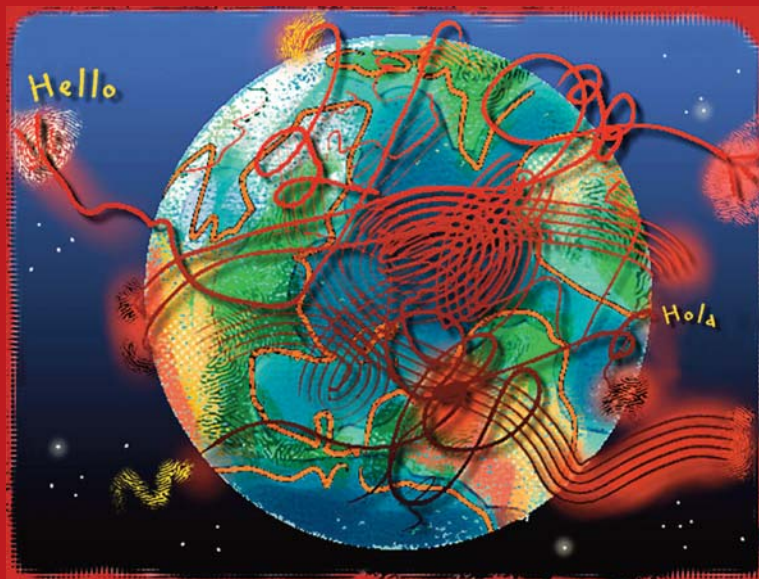
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Annual Conference in New York City, and the Association honored her contribution to school outreach by presenting her with a certificate of recognition during the Annual Meeting of All Members on October 30th. "It's always a great experience to connect with colleagues at the conference," she said, "and it was very moving to be recognized at the Annual Meeting." The Annual Conference also helped Margarita make another kind of connection: her niece Silvia Gomez Schreiner traveled from White Plains, New York, to Manhattan to attend the School Outreach award ceremony.

More Than a Photo Op

Now back in Reno, Margarita is still promoting the profession. "School Outreach is more than taking a creative photograph: it must show the importance of our profession. Because I won the award, I've been invited to appear on talk shows, and I hope that many more people in the Reno community will come to understand the importance of translation and interpreting."

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Outreach: one classroom at a time



Margarita Griggs
Winner of ATA's 2008-2009 School Outreach Award
Shown here (far left) with ESL students at Reed High School in Sparks, Nevada

In classrooms all over the world, ATA members are educating the next generation of translators and interpreters—and the next generation of clients. The prize for next year's School Outreach winner is free registration to ATA's Annual Conference in Denver, October 27-30, 2010. To learn more, visit www.ata.net.org and choose CAREERS.

ATA School Outreach Program

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Margarita Griggs

Margarita Griggs, a translation specialist in Reno, has been given the 2009 School Outreach Award by the American Translators Association.

Griggs teaches the translation certification class at Truckee Meadows Community College and is the official translator for the Washoe County School District.



Griggs

Long-Term Investment, Immediate Payoff

Speaking on translation and interpreting in schools has always been a long-term investment in the profession, but when 2007 School Outreach Contest winner Alina Mugford used her award to win recognition from her local media and state government, it was clear that the program could also have an immediate payoff. As a result, ATA has actively promoted the last two contest winners.

In response to an ATA press release, 2008-2009 School Outreach Contest winner Margarita Griggs was profiled in a Nevada business weekly, and a local Reno television station featured her in a news story on translation and interpreting. The University of Nevada, Reno also aired a radio interview with Margarita, highlighting her work as a translator and interpreter for the Washoe County School District.

Finally, ATA sent letters to Margarita's state and local political representatives and to Washoe County School District officials, advising them that she had won the School Outreach award and urging them to acknowledge her. The School District responded by recognizing Margarita at the November 24 meeting of its board of trustees. And as *The ATA Chronicle* went to press, she had received a certificate of congratulations from Nevada Governor Jim Gibbons as well as letters of acknowledgement from the Superintendent of the Washoe County School District and the Work Force Development Dean at Truckee Meadow Community College.



Now Open

2009-2010

ATA School Outreach Contest

Make a School Outreach presentation this year, and you could win **free registration to ATA's 51st Annual Conference** in Denver, Colorado, October 27 - 30, 2010. Here's how to enter.

1. Visit ATA's School Outreach Resource Center at www.atanet.org/careers/school_outreach.php and click on Presentation Resource Materials.
2. Choose the age level you like the best and download a presentation, or use the resources on the School Outreach page to round out your own material.
3. Speak on translation and/or interpreting careers at a school or university anywhere in the world between August 1, 2009 and July 19, 2010.
4. Get someone to take a picture of you in the classroom. For tips on getting a winning shot, visit the School Outreach Photo Gallery on ATA's website at www.atanet.org/ata_school/photo_gallery.php and click on Photo Guidelines.
5. E-mail your photo to ATA's Public Relations Committee (pr@atanet.org) with the subject line "School Outreach Contest," or mail your entry to 225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590, Alexandria, VA 22314. Please include: your name and contact information; the date of your presentation; the school's name and location; and a brief description of the class. **You may submit multiple entries.**

The deadline for submissions is midnight on July 19, 2010.

The winner will be contacted no later than August 16, 2010. *You must be a member of ATA or an ATA-affiliated organization to enter.*