

HOME ROOM



INSIDE

Michael Clarkston has done more than teach Rodriguez High School students to wrestle. The science teacher has taught his wrestlers to accept a deaf teammate, a lesson that goes well beyond what they may ever accomplish as athletes.

Pages 2-3

Move over, Mr. Holland

To make Wally Hunt cringe, just ask the Grange Middle School band director how many times he has watched the 1995 movie “Mr. Holland’s Opus.”

Once would have been more than enough.

Hunt has nothing against the movie - the story of a high school music teacher who does not realize how much he is beloved - or Richard Dreyfuss, who earned an Academy Award nomination for his portrayal of the title character.

The movie makes Hunt feel as if he is looking in a mirror. The similarities are uncanny.

“I have a hard time watching that movie because there are a lot of things in that movie that are very personal,” Hunt said. “It was that way even the first time I watched it. It was like, ‘All of this is too real.’”

Holland became a teacher after growing tired of life on the road as a musician. Hunt, who has taught in our district for 28 years, is a professional drummer



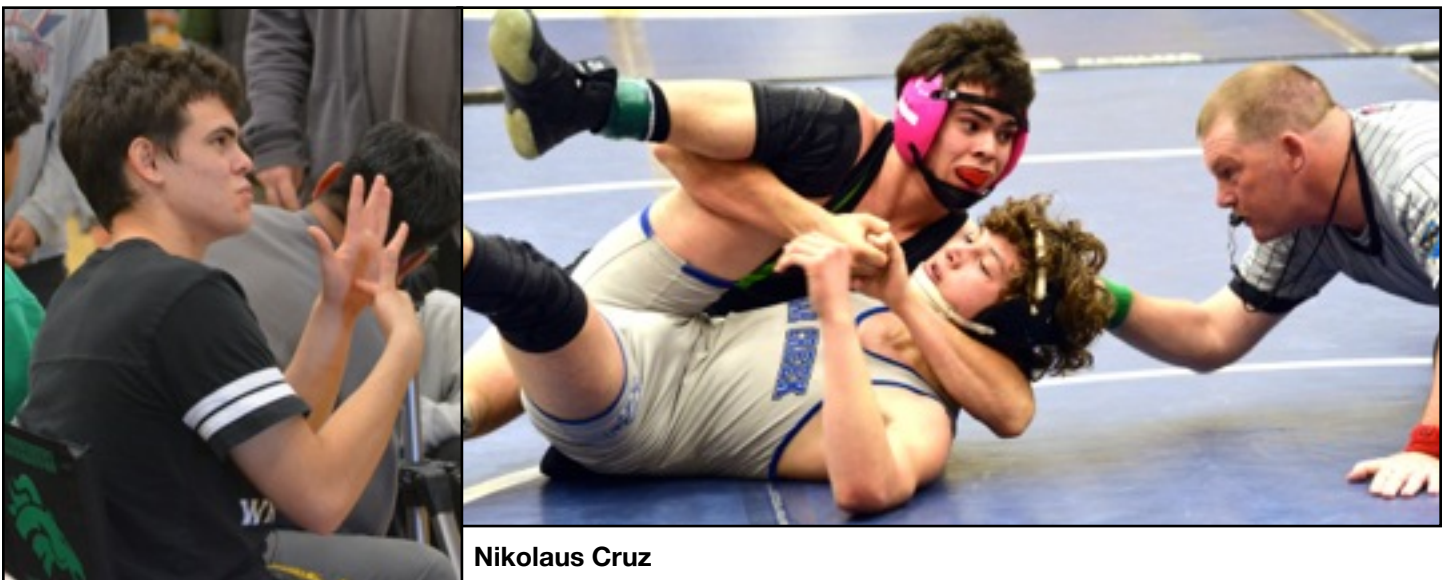
who once performed with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra in New York. As with Holland, Hunt has shared his love of music with more students than he can count.

The difference between the two is that Holland was aspiring to be a composer and Hunt has had 14 compositions published for middle school bands. His first, “Maiden Voyage,” was for the dedication of Dover Middle School in 1994. They are available for purchase at MartianMusic.net.



Interpreter Merrylynn Cowan, left, and coach Michael Clarkston

Lesson in acceptance



Nikolaus Cruz

Disappointment greeted Nikolaus Cruz at Rodriguez High School in 2013 when he arrived as a freshman and was told that he would not be allowed to play football. Cruz ran the risk of being rebuffed a second time when he approached coach Michael Clarkston and asked to join the wrestling team.

Clarkston was different, however. The science teacher has long believed that any student can wrestle as long as he or she “is coachable, works hard and shows up all the time. I try not to turn anyone away.” Cruz agreed to those terms and quickly proved he could keep his end of the bargain. And Clarkston did the same - even though Cruz is deaf.

“I showed (Clarkston) what I could do and he started to trust me,” Cruz explained through one of the two sign language interpreters who assisted Clarkston at wrestling practices and matches.

Cruz repaid Clarkston’s faith as a senior this past season by placing third at 145 pounds in the Sac-Joaquin Section Division I tournament and eighth in the section Masters meet. The 18-year-old fell one win shy of qualifying for the state championships.

All of that became possible for Cruz because Clarkston chose to measure Cruz by what he had instead of what he lacked. Clarkston, who wrestled at Will C. Wood High School in Vacaville and UC Davis, took the time to learn how to communicate with the interpreters so they could relay the coach’s instructions to Cruz.

“I’ve never been good at any languages, even in school, but I’ve learned a little bit (of sign language),” Clarkston said. “Some of (Cruz’s teammates) know a lot more than me.”

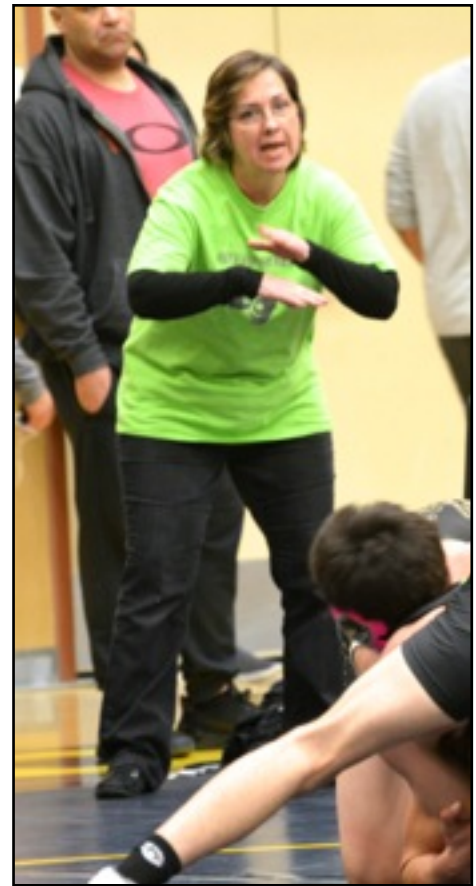
One such teammate was senior Anton Sta Maria, who became the only Rodriguez wrestler to qualify for the state tournament by placing second at 152 pounds in the Masters meet. Clarkston said Sta Marai gladly accepted the responsibility of looking out for Cruz.

“He’s like my brother,” Cruz said of his relationship with Sta Maria. “He doesn’t look down on me at all.”

Clarkston is not at all surprised that Sta Maria and the other wrestlers welcomed Cruz from the beginning. Clarkston has created a culture of acceptance in his program, so Cruz belongs as much as anyone else.

“The is the most diverse team I’ve had, but the kids look past all that,” Clarkston explained. “When practice starts, you’re a wrestler and everyone knows what we need to get done. The only time I have seen one of them get on somebody is when that kid is not doing what they should be doing to be here.”

Although Cruz has wrestled his last match for the Mustangs, Clarkston has taken it upon himself to contact the California Interscholastic Federation to suggest rule changes that will allow interpreters working with a deaf wrestler to have full access around the mat so the wrestler can spot them. Access was limited at times this past season for Cruz’s interpreters, Pamela Pianfetti and Merrylynn Cowan.



Interpreter Pamela Pianfetti

“All we are asking for is for (Cruz) to have the same access as a hearing wrestler. Only his access has to be visual,” Pianfetti said. “We need the freedom to move around as needed to give him that visual access.”

In 2015, a deaf wrestler sued the Michigan High School Athletic Association after his interpreter was denied access. The lawsuit led to the association rewriting its rules and allowing interpreters full access.

Pianfetti worked with Cruz throughout his high school career. She had no idea what to expect when she attended her first practice in 2013 and wondered how Clarkston would handle having a woman hanging out in the wrestling room. There was no cause for concern.

“(Clarkston) just said, ‘Let’s do what we need to do to make this work,’” Pianfetti recalled.

And it did.



Read across Rolling Hills



Leslie Williams (top), Anna Mulvihill (left) and Kathryn Rees (right) join their students on the Rolling Hills Elementary playground to celebrate Read Across America on Feb. 28.

Ready to step forward?

Seven openings on our Executive Board could be your opportunity to serve our association. The openings are Treasurer, Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary and four Members at Large. The election in April will also determine our next State Council Representative and State Council Alternate. The first

step is to complete the Declaration of Candidacy form, which can be found on the Forms/Documents page at www.FSUTA.org. The deadline to submit a Declaration of Candidacy is 5 p.m. Monday, April 9 at the FSUTA office or the Site Representative Council meeting. If you have questions or need additional information, contact Election Committee chair Jenny Ryan at jennylorenuribe@gmail.com.