



Press Release

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Tennis Star Venus Williams Revisits Lynwood Unified Elementary School

Lynwood – On a bright, sunny day this spring, a shiny black Escalade pulled up front at Mark Twain Elementary School and out slid tennis star and Olympic gold medalist Venus Williams.

Williams, who attended first grade at the Lynwood Unified school, was revisiting her old stomping grounds as part of a California Lottery “Back to the Start” social media video campaign to bring celebrities back to their California campuses to surprise inspiring teachers and reminisce on their educational paths.

This is the campaign’s third and final video, which aired on May 1 in honor of National Teacher Appreciation Week on May 8-12.

The teacher: Judy Vellegas, now a kindergarten teacher who has taught at Twain for 34 years. Vellegas’ dedication to her students shines through and, as Williams said, leaves a lasting impact.

“I love teaching younger students because they are very honest with you – what you see is what you get,” Vellegas said. “Students contribute and learn more when they are having fun with their education. When we laugh about something we are learning, I know they understand it.”

But when Williams snuck into Vellegas’ classroom to surprise her, neither could contain their tears as they greeted each other for the first time in about 30 years.

“I loved being in school and watching you with the kids here reminded me of my memories here,” Williams told Vellegas after the emotional reunion. “You are so amazing and such a calming force that a lot of kids, including me, need in their life.”

The two spent time reminiscing about Williams’ quiet personality in first grade, her dad taking her to the tennis courts in Compton after school, and her unwavering desire to dominate in tether ball at recess.

“I used to have to look down to talk with you, now I have to look up!” Vellegas told Williams. “You are such a great role model for my students because if you can do it, they can. I want them to know anything is possible.”

The social media campaign is meant to raise awareness of the California Lottery’s financial support of public schools in California. The California Lottery divides \$1 billion annually among all California public schools.

MORE

The **Lynwood Unified School District** is dedicated to offering students a world-class education to prepare them for success in college and career in the 21st century. Under its Achieving Greatness Initiative, the district is realigning all aspects of its organization to strengthen and expand instructional programs, enrichment and extracurricular activities, and support system for students and staff. For more information, visit www.lynwood.k12.ca.us.

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“We want our students, especially our younger students, to see that role models like Venus Williams have come through Lynwood Unified and that they can be just as successful as her with hard work and dedication,” Lynwood Unified Superintendent Paul Gothold said. “I am grateful that she was able to take the time to come back to Lynwood.”

Lynwood Unified’s priority is to prepare all students for college and career and for alumni and former students to give back to their community, inspiring the next generation of students to do the same.

“It’s amazing whenever we have former students come back to our District to talk with our students,” Lynwood Unified Board President Alma-Delia Renteria said. “I am proud to see that our District is producing such successful individuals who are inspired to make a difference in the world.”

The California Lottery video on Williams’ visit to Mark Twain Elementary can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/2oPSZqE>.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

050117_LUSD_VENUS1: Tennis star and Olympic gold medalist Venus Williams returned to Mark Twain Elementary School to surprise her first-grade teacher Judy Vellegas as part of a California Lottery “Back to the Start” social media video campaign. This is the campaign’s third and final video, which aired on May 1 in honor of National Teacher Appreciation Week on May 8-12.

050117_LUSD_VENUS2: After a heartwarming reunion, Mark Twain Elementary teacher Judy Vellegas (left) and tennis star and Olympic gold medalist Venus Williams speak to Vellegas’ class of kindergarteners after Williams surprised Vellegas as part of a California Lottery “Back to the Start” social media video campaign. This is the campaign’s third and final video, which aired on May 1 in honor of National Teacher Appreciation Week on May 8-12.

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The mission of **Lynwood Unified School District**, the cultivator of innovative thinkers, is to ensure each student fearlessly achieves his or her highest academic and personal aspirations while contributing to the greater society through a unique system distinguished by:

- ★ People of great character who inspire and lead by example
- ★ The instilling of courage to be creative
- ★ The transformative uses of technology
- ★ Safe and clean environments
- ★ The honoring of all voices of our community