



ELIAS FUNEZ/EFUNEZ@THEUNION.COM

Stephen DeSena smiles as he sits behind his desk as the new director at Sierra Montessori Academy in South County. School starts there August 20.

Sierra Montessori Academy welcomes new director

Staff Writer

When students return to Sierra Montessori Academy on Aug. 20, there will be a new face welcoming them to the school.

Stephen DeSena has been appointed the new director of the academy and will lend his experience in education to the Montessori school, which resides in the former location of Pleasant Ridge Elementary.

DeSena holds a K-12 credential in multiple subjects and taught for 10 years with the Sutter County office of education.

"I taught alternative ed," said DeSena. "While I was there I did a lot of program development, teaching students who had been expelled and had demonstrated their inability to get an education in a 'cookie

had to do a lot of program development and figure out what works for those students."

In 2006 DeSena opted to leave the education world and explore a career in real

estate. There, he reasoned, he could submit his resume and continue teaching on a substitute basis. That's where he met with Sierra Montessori Academy and the next

(Montessori), it sounded a lot like what I used to do with outdoor education – taking city kids and putting them in the outdoors. Having them experience new things here where they could be guided at their own pace."

DeSena admits he wasn't even sure what position he was interviewing for, but a week later he was extended an offer. He met with the board, had a chance to ask some questions, and started the week after the board meeting.

"I am stepping into some pretty big shoes of Henry Bietz," he explained, "who was the former director and who has a long history of superintendencies over larger districts in the north state."

DeSena explained that Montessori education

“When they explained the more in-depth detail of (Montessori), it sounded a lot like what I used to do with outdoor education – taking city kids and putting them in the outdoors. Having them experience new things here where they could be guided at their own pace.”

— Stephen DeSena

estate, in which he found success. Despite his love for his newfound position, DeSena felt the classroom calling him back.

DeSena renewed his teaching credential and began substitute teaching one to two days per week. Last April, his wife convinced him to attend a job fair at

thing he knew he was agreeing to an interview the following week.

"I didn't pick Sierra Montessori. Sierra Montessori picked me," said DeSena. "We had a nice long discussion, a nice exchange. I wanted to add another dimension to what I was doing. When they explained

DESENA

From page A1

entails giving educational opportunities to children and allowing them to gain experience and learn lessons at their own pace. It is student-lead, with teachers serving as guides.

Sierra Montessori is a tuition free K-8 public charter school that offers both classroom-based and independent study curriculums.

DeSena added that Sierra Montessori is exploring the option of adding a preschool. The preschool, he said, would increase the footprint of the school and give them

a better foundation for predicting numbers as preschoolers move into transitional kindergarten and kindergarten. This would allow the school to have a semblance of its own feeder system, DeSena said.

Education runs in his family. DeSena's wife, Kimala, recently took on the position of district scholarship and fund development coordinator for the Nevada Joint Union High School District.

His oldest son, Stephen Nicholas, graduated from Nevada Union in June and will soon be attending Biola University in La Mirada, while younger

Seth will enter his junior year at Nevada Union next month.

"What I want to bring to Sierra Montessori is a successful school," DeSena said. "I want to continue to build on what Henry Bietz has brought to this point. I want to increase enrollment; we were at about 140 last year and I'd like to bring it up to 180. Over the next two or three years, up to 200. (That is) capacity based on desired student-teacher ratios."

Jennifer Nobles is a staff writer for The Union. She can be reached at jnobles@theunion.com or 530-477-4231.