

# Eastern Arizona Courier

Local News

DeLaO ends Arizona School Board presidency with song

By Diane Saunders  
Staff Writer



Outgoing Arizona School Board Association President Mike DeLaO accepts a Kachina doll in recognition of his service. DeLaO was honored at the organization's annual dinner and conference Dec. 15. As president, he was able to choose who would entertain during the dinner. He chose the Safford High School choirs, which received rave reviews from those in attendance. Contributed photo

Mike DeLaO's most satisfying moments as president of the Arizona School Boards Association came when the Safford High School choir sang at the organization's membership dinner and annual conference.

"People could not stop talking about our music program," DeLaO said of the choral group's Dec. 15 performance.

DeLaO completed his year as the ASBA's president and now serves as the group's past president. He was succeeded by Suzanne Schweiger-Nitchals of Creighton Elementary School District near Phoenix.

The ASBA is an organization that provides services to member school boards, including training for school board members, assistance in finding new school district administrators and lobbying efforts.

During his year as ASBA president, DeLaO traveled to Idaho, Alaska, Hawaii and Washington, D.C., to work on education initiatives. He said he will travel to the nation's capital on Feb. 1 in connection with his work as a member of the election committee for the National School Boards Association. He also serves on the ASBA's federal relations network.

He has worked on the Native American initiative designed to help American Indians from losing their language. Hawaii is an example of how schools can incorporate native languages and English into the classroom.

"We have a resolution (about the issue) before the NSBA," DeLaO said.

If the resolution gains NSBA approval it will be forwarded to the U.S. Senate for action, he said.

The most disappointing part of serving as ASBA president is the continued lack of state and federal money for the public schools, DeLaO said. This is an issue he deals with regularly as president of the Safford School Board. ASBA lobbyists plead the case for more education funding to state legislators.

"Every year we make headway with them," DeLaO said.

Insufficient state funding hampers small rural districts in their efforts to attract and retain highly qualified teachers because small districts cannot pay competitive salaries.

DeLaO is also frustrated with the AIMS test, which is a byproduct of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Because of state and federal education mandates, teachers find themselves teaching to the AIMS test instead of incorporating their own creativity into the education process.

"Kids can't be kids, and teachers can't teach the way they want to teach," DeLaO said.

Prior to serving as ASBA president, DeLaO was the Graham County ASBA director for four years and was voted the ASBA director of the year for 2004.

DeLaO has served on the Safford School Board since 1999 and works as the game management director for the Eastern Arizona College.

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