

extraordinary WOMEN

presented by
THOMAS J HENRY

Extraordinary Women Award Winners JUDGE DIMPLE MALHOTRA & PRINCIPAL TARA CEVALLOS

St. Austin Catholic School's principal, Tara Cevallos – who also co-founded Dyslexia Center of Austin (DCA) – and Travis County Judge Dimple Malhotra have each been named an Extraordinary Woman by the Austin Statesman and Thomas J. Henry Extraordinary Women program.

DIMPLE MALHOTRA

A groundbreaker who is the first and only person of Asian Indian descent elected to a judicial seat in Travis County, Judge Dimple Malhotra is also the first female Asian-American elected judge in the county's history.

She currently presides over County Court at Law 4, which is the misdemeanor domestic violence court in Travis County.

"I came to this country when I was 2 and spent most of my childhood here – I went back for fourth and fifth grade to India – but I think for me I've always just been interested in the law, and I was discouraged at an early age, just because I never really saw women who looked like me who were practicing law," Malhotra said. "In our community, in our culture, academics is a huge priority, but people were encouraged to be engineers and doctors, and so I never really heard about people in the South Asian Community pursuing law as a career. I was always interested in debate, speech, and mock trial, but what really drew me to law was the desire to help underserved communities in need, just wanting there to be more representation and diversity." Experiences in her own family inspired Malhotra to pursue work in the area of law in which she serves.

"As a child I was exposed to domestic violence, and I knew early on that I wanted to pursue a line of work that would enable me to help others affected by this issue," Malhotra said. "I knew that a law degree would allow me to work in the public interest arena, specifically with non-profit organizations providing legal assistance to survivors of abuse. I have done domestic violence work for 23 years, and my lived and personal experiences give me the ability to thoroughly understand the nuances and dynamics of these cases." The Covid pandemic presented a number of challenges.

"Unfortunately, we saw an increase in domestic violence cases in the pandemic," Malhotra said. "Even though most courtrooms were forced to close for some time, we kept our doors open to ensure that people could have their protective order requests heard without interruption. With the assistance of the Office of Court Administration, we began conducting our proceedings virtually using Zoom. The pandemic has taught us a lot about how we can improve efficiency in our courts. Having Zoom dockets has allowed us to better serve the community. Allowing people to appear virtually makes it easier for them to not have any disruption to their work



schedule. We continue to use a hybrid model of both in person dockets as well as virtual dockets." The colleague who submitted the nomination noted that Malhotra believes having diversity on the bench sends a strong message to the community she serves.

Malhotra was first appointed to the court by the Travis County Commissioners in 2019, and was then elected to the seat by Travis County voters in 2020. She is the first and only elected South Asian judge (and first female Asian judge) in Travis County history.

"Prior to being on the bench, I was the Chief Prosecutor of the Family Violence Unit at the Travis County District Attorney's Office for almost three years. In this role I supervised and trained nine Assistant District Attorneys who exclusively handled family violence cases," Malhotra said. Prior to the DA's office, Malhotra worked at the Travis County Attorney's Office for 10 years and spent most of that time as the Chief Prosecutor of County Court at Law Number 4.

"As Chief, I supervised a staff of 14 individuals, including staff attorneys, counselors, paralegals, and secretaries," Malhotra said. "Toward the end of my time at the County Attorney's Office, I became Chief of the Protective Order Division, where our focus was to secure protective orders for victims of sexual assault, stalking, and domestic violence."

Before working for Travis County, Malhotra worked at non-profit domestic violence agencies in Austin and the San Francisco Bay Area, including the Texas Advocacy Project (Austin, TX), the Support Network for Battered Women (Mountain View, CA), and Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse (Burlingame, CA).

"Working as both a legal advocate and a staff attorney, I assisted survivors of domestic violence in obtaining protective orders, custody orders, and child support," Malhotra said. "I am licensed to practice law in both California and Texas and am a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Texas School of Law."

Malhotra grew up in Dallas before moving to Austin to attend UT, where she received her undergraduate degrees in government and sociology. In law school, she also worked as an attorney ad litem, representing children in court cases.

Malhotra said she is grateful for and honored by the Extraordinary Woman recognition.

"I was fortunate to be raised by an extraordinary woman, my own mother," Malhotra said. "She came to this country alone so that she could create economic opportunities that would enable my father

and I to join her. She worked tirelessly for years to provide for and support our family. In November 2019, she was present when I was sworn in as the first and only Asian American female judge in Travis County."

"I am truly honored and humbled to receive this recognition," Malhotra said. "And for me this means I have a responsibility to the younger women who come after me to continue to break barriers and forge paths for their success."

TARA CEVALLOS

"Principal is my full-time, paying occupation: DCA is my part-time, pro-bono work," Cevallos said. "Both lead into my passion of helping all students achieve their fullest potential in mind, body, and spirit."

A number of factors inspired Cevallos to pursue a career in education. After earning her bachelor's degree in Advertising from UT, she worked in that field for almost 10 years, then became a stay-at-home mom after having her first daughter.

"One day I was volunteering at her Montessori school when the school director told me that she thought I would make a great teacher," Cevallos said. "At that time, I started looking into education and a way that I could make a difference in the lives of students who struggled more than others. I was looking into alternative teaching certification to become an ESL or bilingual teacher."

Cevallos took a job as an assistant at her daughter's Montessori school when the family moved to Austin. "That is when I learned about dyslexia therapy and the impact it could have on the lives of children and the prevalence of dyslexia in the U.S.," Cevallos said. "I applied to the 2-year program to become a Certified Academic Language Therapist (CALT) at Scottish Rite Dyslexia Center (SRDC) here in Austin, and concurrently enrolled at Midwestern State University to get my master's in education, specializing in special education with an emphasis in dyslexia and related disorders." In May 2014, Cevallos was in the middle of her qualified instructor (QI) training with SRDC when it was announced the training center would be closing.

"There was not another training center in Central Texas that trained in the particular program I was trained in, Take Flight: A Comprehensive Intervention for Students with Dyslexia (Take Flight), a curriculum written by the staff of the Luke Waite's Center for Dyslexia and Learning Disorders at Scottish Rite Children," Cevallos said.

"It was at that time that Kelly O'Mullan, a colleague of mine, and Alice Marsel, SRDC's current Education Director, and myself decided we had to open our own center to continue the important work of training Certified Academic Language Therapists (CALT). Educator training is at the core of DCA's mission.

"By training educators as CALTs—the most highly trained dyslexia interventionists who provide the most advanced, evidence-based, and efficacious dyslexia intervention available, we saw the future of the Dyslexia Center of Austin could have in directly impacting the most significant number of students with the greatest need, changing the trajectory of their lives," Cevallos said.

In the past eight years, DCA has expanded its training to more than 20 school districts, charter, and private schools in 15 cities across Texas, Cevallos said. They



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Extraordinary Women Award Winners: Judge Dimple Malhotra and Principal Tara Cevallos

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have trained more than 100 CALTs, plus another 80 who will be either graduating this year, moving to advanced training, or beginning CALT training this summer, and they have added an Executive Director on staff.

"All of this began with the three of us at my dining room table with our own personal materials and money," Cevallos said. "This past year our board started our first Annual Fund giving campaign that was a huge success and will allow for deeper funding opportunities with granting organizations to aid further expansion efforts, such as a permanent home for DCA. With DCA well-versed in virtually training, we now have the experience and infrastructure to expand our training to those individuals who cannot make it to Central Texas



for in-person training."

Cevallos's DCA work is also what first brought her to St. Austin Catholic School (SACS) in 2010.

"I began as a private CALT hired by parents to provide dyslexia remediation to their child(ren) on campus," Cevallos said. "Over time, the school principal asked me to take on more responsibilities as a full-time staff member. By 2014 I was serving as the school's Academic Learning Specialist and Curriculum Director. In 2017, the principal at the time was leaving and he and the school advisory board president asked me to take over as principal. I have been honored to be the school principal since the 2017-18 school year."

The education colleague who sent the nomination called Cevallos a forward-thinker who strives every day to offer opportunities to those around her to learn what they love and love what they learn.

She has also helped lead the school during a major construction project, which will culminate with classes starting in a new building on the original SACS campus in the fall of the 2023-24 school year.

Cevallos said she is humbled by the Extraordinary Woman recognition.

"I never like attention on me – I enjoy working behind the scenes and fighting for the underrepresented," Cevallos said. "This kind of recognition is uncomfortable for me because I never feel like an accomplishment is mine and mine alone. However,



if I sit with my vulnerability in having the spotlight shined on me for a moment, I can see that this recognition brings awareness to the many sacrifices my family has made in not always having me present for dinners or to help with homework over the many years; it shows my daughters that your passion is worth all the sacrifices; and tells all that being there to help others is what we are called to do."

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All nominees will be showcased in our online gallery and our monthly spotlights will be invited to our Celebration Luncheon next January to be recognized for their inspiring leadership and community contributions.

Each month we will feature more extraordinary women in different professional categories in our community.

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