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Notes from editor (not for publication):

By “part of the National Teacher of the Year Program.” does that mean she’s in the running for that honor?

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

Alcarez named Vermont Teacher of the Year

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Windham Regional Career Center teacher is first Career

Technical Education educator in state to win the award

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TEXT BODY:

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She started her own restaurant at the age of 20.

Today, Linda Alvarez teaches young people how to
become entrepreneurs and community leaders themselves.

And now, she has been named 2026 Vermont Teacher of
the Year, the first career and technical education (CTE) educator
in the state to receive this award from the state Agency of
Education.

12 “Being recognized as Vermont’s Teacher of the Year is
13 such an honor,” says the business and entrepreneurship teacher at
14 the Windham Regional Career Center (WRCC). “It means so
15 much to see career and technical education celebrated on a
16 statewide level.”

17 This year, Alvarez says she will “travel around Vermont
18 visiting schools, speaking about CTE, and sharing the incredible
19 work my students do at the Windham Regional Career Center.”

20 Alvarez, who has been at WRCC four years, is now also
21 part of the National Teacher of the Year Program.

22 “I hope to inspire more students to see career education
23 as a path to both purpose and success,” she says. “Our young
24 people are full of ideas and energy. They just need chances to
25 show what they can do. When we give them those opportunities,
26 they surprise us every time.”

27 **Beyond book learning**

28 In Alvarez’s classroom, students experience not just the
29 book learning of business, but the reality.

30 Through projects such as the year-long Food Truck
31 Business Plan, students design, brand, and launch ventures, build
32 3D models of trucks, create marketing campaigns, and present
33 full business plans to community leaders and local bankers.

34 Alvarez’s classroom is intentionally inclusive.

35 First-generation college students, multilingual learners,
36 and neurodiverse students thrive under her guidance. Students
37 leave her programs empowered; many go on to earn college
38 scholarships or enter directly into high-demand careers.

39 “In every way, Linda is the kind of teacher our students
40 deserve,” says Windham Regional Career Center Director Nancy
41 Wiese. “She is a visionary who equips them not only with skills
42 but also with confidence and purpose to shape the future.”

43 “Linda is an exceptional teacher who routinely inspires
44 her students and colleagues at the WRCC,” says Windham
45 Southeast Supervisory Union Superintendent Mark Speno.

46 “Vermont Teacher of the Year is an acknowledgment that is well
47 deserved.”

48 Alvarez says what she likes best about her work is
49 “watching students grow into leaders.”

50 “When they realize they can run a business, present to
51 community members, or earn college credits while still in high
52 school, their whole mindset changes,” she says. “Seeing that
53 pride and excitement never gets old.”

54 The most challenging part of her job, she says, is
55 balancing the different needs of her diverse students.

56 “Some are new Americans learning a new language,
57 others are the first in their family to think about college, and
58 many are figuring out who they want to be,” says Alvarez.
59 “Finding ways to reach every student where they are takes
60 patience, creativity, and heart.”

61 Asked what she’s most proud of, Alvarez says, “the
62 opportunities my students have created for themselves.”

63 “Many have gone on to start small businesses, study
64 business or marketing in college, or use their skills to help their
65 communities,” she says. “Their success is what makes this work
66 so meaningful to me.”

67 Alvarez says she decided to become a business and
68 career teacher because she “loves helping students see the real-
69 world side of learning.”

70 “I want them to understand that education can be hands-
71 on, creative, and connected to their own dreams. I’ve always
72 believed that when students can picture themselves in a career,
73 they become more confident and motivated to reach their goals.”

74 **Roots and wings**

75 Originally from Dearborn, Michigan, and Gainesville,
76 Florida, Alvarez lives now in Brattleboro with her husband,
77 Orlando, and their son, Sebastian. She is also stepmother to
78 Genie, Jamie, and Joseph, and grandmother to Lucas. Outside
79 school, she has owned and operated two successful restaurants,

80 including the Restless Rooster, which operated on Elliot Street.

81 She also loves cooking, camping, and watching Detroit sports.

82 The Teacher of the Year holds an MBA from Fitchburg
83 State University in management/marketing/communications, a
84 B.A. in history with a minor in education from the University of
85 Florida, and is currently completing a Certificate in School
86 Management and Leadership from Harvard Graduate School of
87 Education at Harvard University.

88 She holds certifications in CTE Business, History (6-12),
89 and Reading and Language Arts (K-12) and has taught at Bellows
90 Falls Middle School, Gainesville (Florida) High School, and the
91 A. Quinn Jones Center, another school in Florida.

92 Alvarez serves as a Future Business Leaders of America
93 advisor, a member of the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union
94 Special Education Parent Advisory Council, and an adjunct
95 professor at Vermont State University and the Community
96 College of Vermont.

97 Educational philosophy

98 When applying to Fitchburg, Alvarez had to write a
99 speech in which she — presciently, perhaps — was to presume
100 she had won the very award that she has, indeed, won.

101 She chose the title “CTE Teaching Toward Belonging,
102 Purpose, and a Future They Choose.”

103 In her speech, Alvarez notes that her students come from
104 diverse towns, cultures, learning styles, and life experiences.

105 “But here’s what they all have in common: they chose to
106 be in my classroom,” she says. “They chose CTE. And because of
107 that choice, they show up with passion. With curiosity. With grit.
108 And because they chose, they thrive.

109 “This is one of the most important things CTE can teach
110 us: When students feel they have agency, when they see
111 relevance, and know their work matters, they rise. So the
112 question becomes: How do we build a system that doesn’t wait

113 until 11th grade to engage students, but instead calls to them
114 early, welcomes them, and shows them the way forward?”

115 Her answer is to do what’s being done at WRCC:
116 “working to build that system, one intentional step at a time.”

117 “We’re expanding hands-on, experiential learning for
118 students starting in 6th grade. We’re forming partnerships with
119 elementary schools, aligning curriculum with our sending
120 schools, and inviting middle schoolers into our center to explore
121 programs.

122 “We want every eighth-grader to leave WRCC thinking, ‘I
123 can see myself here.’ Because if students can’t see themselves in
124 our spaces, they won’t stay in our systems. But access alone isn’t
125 enough. Once students arrive, they must feel they belong. That
126 means making sure every student feels represented, supported,
127 and able to see success as a real possibility. We are proud to be
128 part of Vermont’s statewide CTE Equity and Diversity initiative.”

129 Alvarez goes on to say that “learning shouldn’t end with
130 a grade.”

131 “That’s why in southern Vermont we partner with the
132 Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation to connect students
133 with job shadows, internships, and career pathways,” she says.
134 “Our FBLA chapter sends students across the country to compete,
135 learn, and lead. My students are not just participating, they’re
136 learning to take the lead.

137 “And yet I keep returning to this: We must start sooner.
138 CTE is not a last resort. It is not a back-up plan. It is not a side
139 door. It is a pathway that empowers students to lead with their
140 strengths, engage with real-world learning, and build futures
141 rooted in relevance and purpose.”

A year of speaking and

accolades

As the 2026 Vermont Teacher of the Year, Alvarez will serve as an advocate for students, educators, and the transformative power of Career and Technical Education.

She will also be recognized at the University of Vermont's Outstanding Teacher Day in November, and she will represent Vermont in the spring for the National Teacher of the Year program, which includes events in Washington, D.C.

"I am thrilled to recognize Linda as Vermont's Teacher of the Year," says Secretary of Education Zoie Saunders. "Linda's commitment to equity, innovation, and excellence prepares students not only for careers and college, but for meaningful lives beyond the classroom. We are honored to recognize her contributions to teaching in Vermont."

The Agency of Education has recognized outstanding Vermont teachers through the Vermont Teacher of the Year award since 1964. Generally, about 25 applications in the state are considered for the award.

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