

School grapples with loss of ‘best in the world’

By **Arabella Saunders**
Features Editor

Jamie Angel-Ramirez glanced up from her vocabulary worksheet as she heard the familiar sound of Marc Anthony’s hearty lyrics flowing through the classroom. Moments later, her Spanish teacher, Ramón Sánchez, appeared in front of her and asked her to dance. Nervous, the freshman stood and began to sway with the music. As the song progressed, her nerves subsided as she and Sánchez glided across the room. A wide grin spread across her face as Sánchez turned to the class, proclaiming, “She is the best dancer in the world!”

To students and faculty at First Flight as well as other community members, memories similar to this resurface every time they hear the name Ramón Sánchez.

On June 27, Sánchez passed away at the age of 72 after battling throat and lung cancer for about three years. Originally from Nicaragua, Sánchez taught Spanish in Dare County schools for over 20 years and impacted many people along the way.

“Since the day the school opened, my classroom was two doors down from him and there was never a morning where he did not greet me with a smile and a wonderful hello,” math teacher Jennifer Kinnisten said. “It just goes along with who he was, with the greeting every morning. He was just always positive.”

Assistant Principal Caroline Pearce first met Sánchez when he was teaching her daughter at Manteo Elementary School about 20 years ago.

“My first impression of him was he was accomplished, enthusiastic, well-groomed and he provided the necessary hook for English-speaking children to want to learn Spanish,” Pearce said. “And that’s absolutely how I would describe him today.”

Once a wealthy corporation owner, Sánchez left everything familiar to him behind when he and his family were forced to flee Nicaragua during the Nicaraguan Revolution.

“When he lived in his country, he was a very wealthy person, and when he moved to the U.S. he had to go from being at the top to starting from the very bottom, but I never remember him being negative,” Spanish teacher Nitzia Gale said. “He lost everything and that was very humbling, but he succeeded here.”

Sánchez’s success was evident at his memorial service, held at First Flight on June 30. The auditorium was packed full of friends, family, current and former students, and other members of the community.

“He was always positive and he had an impact on people that showed with the number of people present at his service,” Kinnisten said. “There were students there who have been out of the building for five, six, seven years. It was amazing seeing that many students come back.”

While Sánchez’s teaching abilities were impressive, many agree that one of his greatest successes in life was raising his children with his wife, Teresitá.

“One of the things about him that really impressed me was how important his family



Photos submitted by Michelle Sanchez
Andrew Sánchez plays the piano during the memorial service for his father, First Flight Spanish teacher Ramón Sánchez, in a scene that mirrors Ramón performing for a crowd earlier in his life. The enthusiastic Sánchez, known for his catchphrase ‘the best in the world!’ died in June following a battle with cancer.

was to him,” Pearce said. “That the boys were gentlemen and the girls were ladies and that they had self-respect and respect for others.”

Not only did he have outstanding character traits, Sánchez possessed skills that many are unaware of.

“I think I was the first person, years ago at Manteo High School, to discover that he was a concert pianist,” Pearce said. “We were doing an activity together in French and Spanish and he said, ‘Well, I can play that,’ and I said ‘Oh, stop,’ and so he sat down and just went from one end of the keys to the other. All I could think was, ‘Oh my gosh.’”

In addition to being an accomplished musician, Sánchez was also a skilled pingpong player, earning a national title in Nicaragua and many other titles while competing in the United States. Sánchez was the sponsor and founder of FFHS’ Pingpong Club.

“He was very passionate about pingpong,” junior Leslie Jennings said. “But what made his passion even more strong was being able to share it with his students.”

Inspired by Sánchez’s unfaltering optimism and late science teacher Danielle James’ insightfulness, Principal Tim Albert has plans to make the teachers’ signature phrases “The



Ramón and Teresitá Sánchez

best in the world” and “Have a plan” a constant theme throughout this school year.

“You just can’t say it, you have to practice it to make it happen, and part of that is dedication and caring for individuals,” Albert said. “We will weave that into any type of thing we do, whether that’s communication, whether that’s assemblies, whatever the case may be, we will have different things to honor them throughout the year.”

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