



# ESL MiniConference

## New Candidate Kindles Excitement in Lamar Monty Thompson Runs for School Board

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I am a big fan of the Occupy activities going on across America and internationally. Like my friend Dave Hopkins said recently, "Courage is infectious. Catch it!" Many of us have been inspired by the people power demonstrations this year, starting in Tunisia and Egypt.

In Lamar, Colorado, a place I learned to love during a ten-month education project I did there in 2010, they do things in their own way, and this month a young man named Monty Thompson "occupied" Lamar with his low-budget, word-of-mouth campaign for a position on the local school board. The results came in Wednesday night, and Monty got 805 votes while the winner, a respected town elder, won re-election with 826 votes.



For those of us who know him, Monty's campaign captured our imaginations. He is just a straight-talker, practical thinker, and his near upset of an established board member is now all that people in Lamar want to discuss. The local radio station, [KWAY](#), is interviewing Monty this coming Monday, and he has already promised in writing, in one of the local Web-based newspapers, that he is going to make sure the board does its job, even if he was not quite elected. (See Monty Thompson's concession statement here: <http://secolo-media.com/prowers/2011/11/02/to-the-citizens-and-voters-of-prowers-county/>)

I have seen Monty Thompson in action as a teacher at the local community college in personal and career development classes for young adults. Attendance at these classes is a requirement for people in Lamar who receive unemployment or other social assistance from the local department of social services. But before Monty came, participation and motivation were very low as students sat through unimaginative classes and simply went through the motions on computer skills.

Along came Monty and the first thing he did was integrate the computer skills piece with the career development piece, so that powerpoints, Internet, and eventually Web based workforce skill-building were interwoven with the content of each theme and unit. I remember going to

his class and participating while his students competed to see who could build a 50-slide PowerPoint with at least one graphic per slide. Students were pushing themselves to their full potential in response to lessons with Monty, because he understood them and respected them as fellow human beings.

He also has trained teachers, families, and students on computer skills in the local school system, and rebuilds discarded computers in his garage to donate to individuals who show great potential but cannot afford to buy a computer themselves.

He and his wife and children hosted a boy from Japan for 8 weeks several summers ago, and they did everything to keep that young person entertained and provide him with a fulfilling American experience. I remember Monty took the boy to meet and shake hands personally with the mayor and city commission members, and was very busy making sure to bring Japanese speakers in to help the boy communicate and make sure he didn't feel isolated.

Monty and our adult education team attended a big state-wide conference in Denver in the fall of 2010, and he took advantage of every moment during those three days to attend sessions, share ideas, and take notes on things that he could use later. The following weeks, he developed an action plan for implementing changes on behalf of businesses and prospective workers in the depressed Lamar economy, and was busy presenting it directly to city leaders and community members.

It was so exciting to observe Monty Thompson's first political campaign this season, albeit from my distant perspective in Manhattan, Kansas. Now he is interested in getting his peers in Lamar to join him as the new generation of leadership.

Maybe he didn't really lose after all.

Article by Robb Scott  
Contact info for Monty Thompson:  
[mtray312@gmail.com](mailto:mtray312@gmail.com)

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