

10 teachers named first winners of Central Illinois Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching

The first annual Central Illinois Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching were presented June 7, 2008, at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in Urbana, IL. The ceremony will be telecast June 26 at 9 p.m. on WILL-TV, the PBS station in Champaign.

A total of 600 teachers from 18 counties in central Illinois were nominated for the award. Thirty finalists were named in January. Each finalist then was observed in their classroom and interviews were conducted with their principal, colleagues, students, and students' parents.

Each of the 10 Award winners will receive a tuition-free spring- and summer-term sabbatical at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a personal computer, \$3,000, and membership in the Golden Apple Central Illinois Academy of Educators, in which they will work together to ensure that all children have the excellent teachers they deserve.

Following is a detailed list of the Award winners:

Winners of the 2008 Golden Apple Central Illinois Award for Excellence in Teaching

Shameem Rakha, Franklin Middle School, Champaign — 6-8 Grades, Reading and Language Arts Gifted Program

Shameem is an energetic teacher who has dedicated herself to bringing untapped children into the gifted program, particularly minorities. She is a language arts teacher and has developed a Greek and Latin roots vocabulary curriculum that has now been adopted by the district. She actively involves her students in social justice and they just finished filming an anti-bullying film with an international director that debuted at the Virginia Theatre last week.

Suzanne McDowell, Bloomington Area Vocational Center— Cooperative Education 11-12 Grade, 9-12 Business

Suzanne is a lifetime vocational education and business teacher. She runs the cooperative education program and is committed to keeping students in school and giving them keys to succeed in life. She is part social worker, part teacher, and part mother to her students, most of whom live in poverty and come from dysfunctional homes. Her carefully targeted career placements have resulted in many of her former students pursuing successful lifetime careers with their high school employers.

Tim McCollum, Charleston Middle School, Charleston — 8th Grade, Science

Tim is a veteran teacher known as “Mr. Science” in the Charleston community. He takes science outside the classroom and involves the greater community in science, hosting star parties and collaborating with NASA scientists and Polarpalooza. In 2004 he was awarded the Presidential Award for Math and Science Teaching for Illinois and he currently serves on the National Science Board Commission on 21st Century Education in Science and Technology.

Don Jolly, Our Saviour Catholic School, Jacksonville — 6th Grade

Don taught in the Jacksonville public schools for over 30 years before retiring. He could not bear being out of the classroom and went to Our Saviour. He is a calm and gentle educator who actively utilizes his social studies curriculum to make students from this homogeneous community into culturally aware global citizens. His classroom is a vibrant living classroom where textbooks are brought to life in hands on activities.

Hillary Sawyer, Booker T. Washington Elementary School, Champaign

Hillary is our youngest finalist and winner. She grew up in poverty and has devoted her career to teaching students coming from similarly difficult circumstances. She has a class of 5th grade low-income students performing at such a high level her classroom was mistaken for a gifted classroom. She integrates her theatre background into the classroom and encourages her students to realize their own potential and creativity.

David Hirst, Normal Community West High School — 9-12 Grades, Spanish

David teaches Spanish and AP Spanish. He integrates everything from math to ecology to pop culture into his lessons and has been incredibly successful in teaching his students to be proficient Spanish speakers. His dedication to his students and the broader community is unquestioned; he postponed a surgery so his students would not have a non-Spanish speaking substitute and he is a skilled musician who regularly accompanies students at Solo and Ensemble competitions.

Elaine Harmon, Thomas Paine Elementary School, Urbana — Kindergarten

Elaine creates a loving environment in which students thrive and she is an expert at picking up new techniques and strategies and constantly revising her approach to teaching based on what is best for her students. She values a very organic and differentiated style of learning in her classroom; for example she encourages her students to teach each other and she has an area set aside where students can elect to work quietly and independently.

Sheila Stephens, Illinois School for the Deaf, Jacksonville — 9-12 Grades, Biological Sciences

Sheila worked in the medical field as a scientist before deciding to teach. She taught in her local school for several years and 6 years ago discovered that the School for the Deaf needed a science teacher. She had no background in deaf education or ASL but felt a call. The school provided an interpreter for her for the first year until she could take classes to learn to sign. After 3 weeks she sent the interpreter away and said she wanted to work without the safety net and reached an amazing level of fluency in her first year. She sought grants to build a hydroponics lab for her students and each year takes a group to Epcot in Orlando to work in the experimental hydroponics lab at Disneyworld. The school is primarily residential and she spends countless out of school hours with her students, doing additional science work, tutoring them, and being a friend and mentor to them.

Nancy Powell, Bloomington High School —9-12 Grades, Math

Nancy has been described as "the Michael Jordan of math in the classroom." Nancy has been incredibly active in introducing new math curriculum and is a leader in this area nationally. She brings an infectious joy and enthusiasm for her subject matter to the classroom and it rubs off on her students. She is a proponent of hands on math and engages her students in activities such as building a giant cupcake to demonstrate principles of calculus.

Roberta Maubach, Thomas Metcalf Lab School, Bloomington — 3rd Grade

Roberta literally transforms her classroom to fit certain units of curriculum. She transforms it into the Titanic or the belly of a whale. Students work in a living classroom. One of the most touching stories about Roberta was related to the death of a child at her school. The way she helped her student mourn this loss was really beautiful. They created a memory book about this student and memorialized him in their classroom in a positive way.