

# Golden Apple Foundation

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **10 Chicago-area teachers named winners of Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching**

(CHICAGO — May 7, 2008) Golden Apple Foundation, which is dedicated to recognizing and developing excellence in teaching, today announced the names of 10 Chicago-area winners of the 2008 Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching in grades 4 through 8.

The 10 winners include six teachers at five Chicago schools (Clark, 2; Gray, Pershing West, Pierce, Sheridan Magnet); one Cook Co. suburban school (Sunset Ridge, Northfield); one Kane Co. school (Sunny Hill, Carpentersville); one Lake Co. school (Lake Zurich North Middle, Hawthorne Woods), and one Will Co. school (Kennedy Middle, Plainfield).

A total of 850 teachers from Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake and Will counties were nominated for the award, which was first presented in 1986. Thirty-one finalists were named in March.

Each of the 10 Golden Apple Award winners will receive a tuition-free spring-term sabbatical at Northwestern University; a personal computer from IBM; \$3,000; and membership in the Golden Apple Academy of Educators, which now has inducted 220 expert teachers who work together to ensure that all children have the excellent teachers they deserve.

The Awards selection committee is comprised of distinguished Chicago-area educators. Two selection committee members observed each of the 31 finalists in their classroom and interviewed their principal and selected colleagues, parents and students.

In addition to the 10 Award winners, Golden Apple is recognizing 13 Teachers of Distinction — Award finalists whose superior teaching work was noted by the selection committee. The Teachers of Distinction are recognized for their distinguished contribution to teaching and are asked to participate in Golden Apple programs.

The Award winners and Teachers of Distinction will be honored at an award ceremony on Sept. 6 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago, which subsequently will be aired as a one-hour prime-time special on WTTW/Channel 11.

Following is a detailed list of the Award winners and Teachers of Distinction:

## Winners of the 2008 Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching

- **Holly Bontkowski**  
**8<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Kennedy Middle School**  
12350 E. Essington Rd., Plainfield  
815-439-8024  
*Holly believes that being a good teacher is never just a given. She believes being in the classroom is both an asset, and admittedly at times, a hindrance to her. She feels students change over time, and making sure her teaching changes to meet the needs of the students in front of her is of the utmost importance.*
- **Carol Broos**  
**Music, 4-8**  
**Sunset Ridge School**  
525 Sunset Ridge Rd., Northfield  
847-881-9400  
*Carol creates a classroom environment for discovery, opportunity and expression. She feels her classroom is where mistakes are allowed and creativity is heralded. The personalization that Carol creates is the cornerstone of her teaching music, theater, and technology.*
- **Monica Gil**  
**7<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Gray Elementary School**  
3730 N. Laramie, Chicago  
773-534-3520  
*Monica feels that she cannot control what goes on after her students leave the building every day but she can control what goes on in her classroom and the environment she creates. She makes her classroom a safe place where students can feel comfortable voicing their opinions and know they can succeed.*
- **Samina Khan**  
**Science, 6-8**  
**Clark Academic Preparatory Magnet High School**  
5101 W. Harrison St., Chicago  
773-534-6250  
*Samina sees Science as a global activity and a field of evolving human endeavor that needs to be studied by all students. She feels arousing curiosity in her students opens them to new ideas and helps develop a level of healthy skepticism about scientific discoveries and other claims made in the name of science.*

- **Nancy Kontney**  
**5<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Sunny Hill School**  
 2500 Helm Rd., Carpentersville  
 847-426-4232  
*Nancy wants the children in every classroom she has ever had the privilege to teach to feel good about themselves and to believe that they can do anything they set out to do. She knows that if she can instill this in her students they will be successful in many aspects of their lives.*
- **Daniel Morvaji**  
**6<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Lake Zurich North Middle School**  
 95 Hubbard Lane, Hawthorne Woods  
 847-719-3600  
*Daniel believes it is possible to have fun in school. It is also possible to have fun while learning. He feels the best lessons he has ever taught are those in which students have so much fun they don't realize they are learning and that's the type of learning the students remember forever.*
- **Natalie Neris-Guereca**  
**5<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Pershing West Magnet School**  
 3200 S. Calumet, Chicago  
 773-534-9240  
*Natalie teaches to heal, just as her favorite teacher did. She teaches to represent possibility. She feels that she can say confidently to her students, "I know how you feel," and her words are sincere. She knows that she can equip her students with the tools necessary to accomplish their full potential.*
- **John Nieciak**  
**Language Arts, 6<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>**  
**Sheridan Math and Science Academy**  
 533 W. 27<sup>th</sup> St., Chicago  
 773-534-9120  
*John values the authentic, immediate responses students experience when engaged with text. He considers those first moments an effective means to identify a student's understanding. He places a strong value on purposeful talk in the classroom and believes the insights that his students gain from talk will provide a means for him to foster increased and continued student learning.*

- **Brooke Thompson**  
**Music, K-8**  
**Pierce School of International Studies**  
1423 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago  
773-534-9120  
*Brooke jokingly refers to her Music classroom as the “Taj Mahal” of music rooms! She feels her mission is to teach Language Arts, Math and Science through music. Her students learn to work together to produce a beautiful and fulfilling sound, thus developing an aesthetic sense.*
- **Donnell White**  
**Math, 7-8**  
**Clark Academic Preparatory Magnet High School**  
5101 W. Harrison St., Chicago  
773-534-6250  
*Donnell thinks teaching is fluid and requires constant reflection. He believes what works today may not work tomorrow. What works on one student may not work on another. To help his male students overcome academic apathy Donnell created an organization called Proud Young Men.*

### **2008 Golden Apple Teachers of Distinction**

- **Margaret Burns**  
**5<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Gallistel Language Academy**  
10347 S. Ewing Ave., Chicago  
773-535-6540  
*Margaret (Meg) believes giving her children a voice through art is absolutely critical to their development. If art is the very essence of who they are then they are more apt to find their place in society if they can connect to their identity.*
- **Jennifer Cho**  
**4<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**National Teachers Academy**  
55 W. Cermak Rd., Chicago  
773-535-4825  
*Jennifer’s goal is to make her students have at least one moment where they say to themselves, “Wow, I love school!” She tries to make her classroom a field experience of math, science, literature and social studies.*

- **Lisa Espinosa**  
**7<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Ruiz School**  
 2410 S. Leavitt, Chicago  
 773-535-4825

*Because the beginning of the day can be such a charged time for Lisa's students, she incorporates "gratitude journals" into this time as an added way to bring her students together and set a positive tone for the school day. This is a special component of her students' day.*
- **Heather Kelsey**  
**6-8 grades**  
**St. Gall School**  
 5515 S. Sawyer Ave., Chicago  
 773-737-3454

*Heather believes that all knowledge builds on itself, and if her students can make connections to their lives they will be able to strengthen their knowledge base and delve deeper into higher-order thinking.*
- **Virginia Kogen**  
**7-8 grades**  
**Madero School**  
 3202 W. 28<sup>th</sup> St., Chicago  
 773-535-4466

*Virginia's most influential teacher was her sophomore English teacher who set high expectations in class. Virginia does the same with her students. She does not hesitate to expect the best from her students because few people in their lives do.*
- **Brenda Kraber**  
**3-5 grades**  
**Glen Grove School**  
 3900 Glenview Rd., Glenview  
 847-998-5030

*Brenda's classroom is very active and full of modeling. Her fifth graders model for the third and fourth graders. Painted on one of the walls in her classroom is a huge apple tree with the names of her fifth graders and written gratitude comments from the third and fourth graders.*

- **Sharon Kranz**  
**4<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Roslyn Road Elementary School**  
 22 Roslyn Road, Barrington  
 847-381-4148  
*Sharon's classroom environment is very important to her, and she works intentionally at building relationships with her students to keep the atmosphere positive, respectful and fun. Sharon feels that in this environment her students can be free to take some risks, make plenty of mistakes, and enjoy coming and learning together.*
- **Patrick McAndrew**  
**5<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Beye Elementary School**  
 230 N. Cuyler Ave., Oak Park  
 708-524-3070  
*Patrick often has parents who volunteer come into his class and read to the students. He makes sure that each book his students read alternates between having a male protagonist and a female one. Patrick sums up his students' day in class as being filled with wonder, exploration, discovery, risk-taking, surprises, joys, successes, and yes, even some disappointments.*
- **Mary Meade**  
**Science, 1-8**  
**Christopher School**  
 5042 S. Artesian, Chicago  
 773-535-9375  
*Mary encourages her students to reach for the stars. She encourages them to look for examples of what they learned in Science on their way home, in their own homes, and then share their new knowledge with their family members. Mary believes that her students' learning does not end when they walk out of the classroom.*
- **Mark Nelson**  
**Fine Arts, K-8**  
**Stone Academy**  
 6239 N. Leavitt, Chicago  
 773-534-2045  
*One of Mark's first goals as the art teacher was to have his students enhance the interior and exterior surroundings of the school. His students created mosaics, sculptures, murals, and gardens, converting the industrialized appearance of their school into a kid-friendly site that hinted at the magic that transpired within the walls.*

- **Esther Ohito**  
**English, 6-8**  
**Pershing West Magnet School**  
3200 S. Calumet Ave., Chicago  
773-534-9240

*Esther views her students as capable of success and deserving of opportunities by virtue of their very existence. She believes that they are entitled to instructional, social, and extra-curricular opportunities that validate their experiences and prepare them to engage with and succeed in a world beyond the borders of their neighborhood.*

- **Claudine Randolph**  
**5<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**University of Chicago Charter School – Donoghue Elementary**  
707 E. 37<sup>th</sup> St., Chicago  
773-729-5300

*Claudine has created an atmosphere of caring that is evident in the way her students stick up for each other and will seek help without feeling shame in asking. Claudine feels her students want to see their peers succeed academically and socially, and therefore turn to each other for assistance and guidance.*

- **Veronica Ruelas**  
**8<sup>th</sup> grade**  
**Academy of St. Benedict the African**  
6020 S. Laflin St., Chicago  
773-776-3316

*Veronica always tell her students that no matter who walks by their classroom and when they walk by, she wants them to think as they walk away, that there is learning happening and that there are some very bright students in her room. She feels her expectations are very high in terms of what they produce academically and how they behave.*