



Rebecca Leff, a fourth-grade teacher at Palatine's Quest Academy, was named one of 31 finalists for this year's Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching.

Area teachers up for Golden Apple awards

By Chad Brooks and Madhu Krishnamurthy | Daily Herald Staff

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While teachers usually enjoy getting an apple from their students, a handful of area educators are now vying for an apple with a bit more importance.

Teachers from Barrington, Carpentersville, Hawthorn Woods, Palatine and Lincolnshire have all been named finalists for the 2008 Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching in grades four through eight. Ten winners will be named this spring.

This year's finalists include Nancy Kontney, a fifth-grade teacher at Sunny Hill School in Carpentersville; Sharon Kranz, a fourth-grade teacher at Roslyn Road School in Barrington; Karina Richter, who teaches eighth grade at Wright Junior High in Lincolnshire; Daniel Morvaji, who teaches sixth grade at Lake Zurich North Middle School in Hawthorn Woods; and fourth-grade teacher Rebecca Leff of Palatine's Quest Academy.

"This is very exciting," Leff said. "Everyone has been very congratulatory."

Quest Headmaster Ben Hebebrand said Leff is someone who teaches from the heart and develops creative learning experiences for her students.

"She is excellence personified," he said.

The award acknowledges Chicago-area teachers' commitment to academic excellence and dedication to their profession. More than 850 teachers were nominated for the award, which has been given since 1986.

The finalists will be honored March 15 at the Celebration of Excellence in Teaching at the Hyatt Regency McCormick in Chicago.

A teacher for more than 26 years in Barrington, Kontney said she is overwhelmed by the honor, calling it "just incredible."

Being able to make connections with her students is what Kontney said has kept her going all these years.

"That is what I treasure most," Kontney said.

Morvaji watched others receive the Golden Apple award and aspired to earn the honor one day.

"It's something that you see on TV and you hear these amazing teachers speaking for your profession, and in the back of your mind you hope that you can get close to that someday," he said.

Roslyn Road Principal Paul Kirk said Kranz is very deserving of the honor.

"Sharon is just an incredible teacher," he said. "She has a tireless passion for the profession."

Richter said she was shocked to learn she was a finalist.

"I just found out at 5:10 p.m., which is why I don't have a lot to say because I'm pretty speechless," she said. "I'm just sort of shaking and nervous. This is pretty serious stuff. I'm just sort of overwhelmed. It's a great honor."

In choosing the winners, an awards selection committee composed of 70 Chicago-area educators will spend the next month observing each of the 31 finalists in the classroom and interviewing their principals and selected colleagues, parents and students.

The 10 Golden Apple Award winners will be announced in mid-April and then honored at a ceremony on Sept. 6 in Chicago.