

## Golden Apple nominee helps deaf students find their voice

[By Sara Hooker](#) | Daily Herald Staff | Published: 4/22/2009 12:01 AM



Jeanette Hachmeister leads children who are deaf or have diminished hearing in traditional lessons that also focus on students' oral language acquisition. Tanit Jarusan | Staff Photographer

*The Golden Apple Foundation picked 30 Chicago-area finalists for the 2009 Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching in prekindergarten through third grade. Nearly 1,000 teachers were nominated. The finalists were honored April 18 at the Celebration of Excellence in Teaching at the Hyatt Regency McCormick in Chicago.*

*In May, 10 Golden Apple Award winners will be selected. They'll join 230 expert teachers who have been selected over the past 23 years. Winners receive a tuition-free spring term sabbatical at Northwestern University, a computer, \$3,000, and a membership into the Golden Apple Academy.*

*In DuPage County, three people were selected as finalists: Jeanette Hachmeister of Child's Voice School in Wood Dale, Barbara Cataldo of Siple Elementary in Woodridge, and Mia Bohlin of Ardmore Elementary in Villa Park.*

*This is the third in a three-part series on the nominees.*

Jeanette Hachmeister cites the moment when one of her students sang "Part of Your World" from the movie "The Little Mermaid" out loud in class as one of her most poignant teaching experiences.

It may not sound like an enormous feat to teachers of typical students, but for this prekindergarten teacher at Child's Voice School in Wood Dale, it was the culmination of her career.

Child's Voice School is a private oral deaf school where children who are hard of hearing or profoundly deaf learn to listen and talk without the use of sign language.

Such successes at Child's Voice are the reason she's being lauded as a finalist for a Golden Apple Award, said the school's executive director, Michele Wilkins.

"She brings learning alive," Wilkins said. "She does this through her music and movement, and you can hear her children chanting their lessons up and down the hall."

The day Hachmeister's student sang, her class was listening to that song while there was a significant amount of background noise - which makes it that much more difficult for students with hearing disabilities.

"It was one of those unbelievable moments when the kids - he's profoundly deaf - when they use technology and methodology that we teach to help them to hear," said Hachmeister, an Elmhurst resident. "He was doing just a natural thing, but it took a lot of work to get him to do that natural thing. It just melted my heart, just singing to the tape 'Part of Your World.'"

Hachmeister is a regular education teacher, with a twist. She mimics everything a standard teacher would do but with a focus on language and vocabulary.

So much of a child's learning is incidental learning - where they learn from hearing adults talking in the background at home and school, Hachmeister said. At Child's Voice, teachers use a more formal introduction to the same types of concepts.

"It's wonderful to see the kids get an idea at their age. Their faces light up. There's a great big smile. You can see them developing self-confidence," Hachmeister said. "And that's what I enjoy doing."

Hachmeister earned an undergraduate degree from Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis., and later earned a master's degree from Smith College's Clarke School for the Deaf in Northampton, Mass.

She's taught at several public schools and has spent 11 years at Child's Voice.

Wilkins said she's thrilled Hachmeister has been nominated for such a prestigious award.

"She's is absolutely an outstanding teacher here," Wilkins said. "She is spectacular."