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District boasts 3 Golden Apple nominees

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By **Mary Bernhard** lw correspondent

Manhattan Junior High principal Ron Pacheco recently announced the junior high has three Golden Apple nominees on its staff.

"We are so proud to have not just one, but three staff members nominated for the award," Pacheco said. "All of the teachers are thrilled. The whole staff is proud of their colleagues."

The Golden Apple for Excellence in Teaching was the idea of Golden Apple founder Martin J. Koldyke, who felt that excellent teachers in the Chicago area were not receiving adequate recognition for their important contribution to society.

Every year since 1986, Golden Apple has chosen 10 outstanding teachers to receive the prestigious award. These teachers then become lifetime members of the Golden Apple Academy of Educators. Modeled after the Academy Awards, the Golden Apple Awards are broadcast each spring on Chicago Public Television.

Praise for teachers

Pacheco has a lot of nice things to say about the three nominees at Manhattan Junior High.

"Teachers are nominated by fellow teachers, parents and community members," said Pacheco of the nominations, "I don't know who nominated the teachers; it is anonymous."

Given the opportunity, Pacheco acknowledged he would have nominated them himself.

"Paula Paymaster has reached lives and innovated the school community," Pacheco said. "She really knows how to reach students to bring out their full potential. While making science exciting, she is active in the community."

An example of Paymaster's work is the current project assigned to sixth grade. The sixth-graders are finding ways for the school and office to conserve energy and eliminate waste by recycling.

"Tracy Carlson-Lesh teaches students with severe disabilities," Pacheco said of the second nominee. "She is very passionate and does not let students accept disabilities as a shortcoming in life."

'Tireless patience'

"The dignity involved and the way she handles her classroom," Pacheco said "... students may be frustrated, but through her work and tireless patience she makes the students models in the education community."

Nominee Joyce Pacheco single-handedly implemented the first orchestra program in the Lincoln Way feeder schools.

"Now many other schools are following suite," Pacheco noted. "New Lenox has started the program and now Mokena and Frankfort are in the process of starting one, too."

"Joyce has also turned around a choir that had limited membership and made them an award-winning group within a year," Pacheco said.

Winners receive a sabbatical to Northwestern University in Evanston. The teachers may take as many courses as they wish in any subjects they choose. They also receive a laptop computer, a \$3,000 award, induction into the Golden Apple Academy of Educators and recognition on a one-hour WTTW TV program.

There is a lot of competition to become a finalist. Each year, Golden Apple receives about 1,000 nominations for excellent teachers.

Selection process

Being nominated is only the first step to becoming a Golden Apple Award winner. Each eligible nominee must complete an application, including essay responses, and must submit three letters of recommendation. From the hundreds of completed applications, approximately 30 teachers are selected each year as finalists. Finalists are interviewed and observed in the classroom before the 10 winners are chosen.

Nominated teachers must be full-time teachers at a public or nonpublic school in Cook, Dupage, Kane, Lake or Will counties. For the 2007-08 school year, teachers must spend the majority of their assignment time teaching students in grades four to eight.

The program rotates each year to differing grade levels. In 2009, nominees will come from grades pre-K to grade three, while in 2010 nominees will be high school teachers.

In order to be considered for a Golden Apple, a teacher must first be nominated. Anyone may nominate a teacher, however a teacher may not nominate him or herself.

Choosing the 10 winners from hundreds of applicants is the job of a selection committee made up of more than 80 volunteers. Committee members include principals, administrators, members of higher education facilities, other educators and previous winners, according to the organization's Web site.

Golden Apple looks for teachers who exemplify the highest standards and practices of the teaching profession. These qualities include demonstrating distinguished classroom practice, professionalism and collegiality, high standards for themselves and their students, the ability to create a classroom environment conducive to learning the ability to reflect on practice, creativity and commitment to students and their learning, among other things.

In addition to the 10 winners, the committee will name 10 Teachers of Distinction deserving of acknowledgement for their accomplishments.

The three teachers should hear in February if they are one of the finalists for the award.