

GOLDEN APPLE AWARDS

Energy, creativity put teacher many steps above

By Tara Malone | Tribune reporter
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Marina Gibson never thought much about social studies.

Historic dates and ancient alliances seemed, well, *old*, until the 6th grader stepped into Lake Zurich Middle School North teacher Dan Morvaji's class; where jousting livens lessons about the Middle Ages and students create rap songs to memorize facts about Chinese dynasties.

"It's easier for you to learn if you're doing something you remember," said Gibson, 12.

Such creativity earned Morvaji, 36, kudos Wednesday when he was named one of the top 10 teachers in the Chicago area and the first educator to receive a Golden Apple award in Lake Zurich School District 95.

"Wow, thank you, thank you. Who wants an apple?" Morvaji said as students mobbed him with high-fives and hugs.

On Wednesday, music teacher Carol Broos was also surprised by the delivery of a package of apples at Sunset Ridge School in Northfield. Broos and Morvaji joined teachers from Chicago, Carpentersville and Plainfield who were recognized Tuesday.

Nearly three dozen Golden Apple Foundation officials, district administrators and community members surprised Broos, 52, in the music lab she envisioned two years ago. Students there worked on computers with headsets as they experimented with music-themed blogs and podcasts, mixed music for their self-designed Web sites or just played the piano. Such mingling of technology and music is designed to put music within every child's reach.

The winners will receive a tuition-free sabbatical at Northwestern University, a computer from IBM and \$3,000, among other prizes.

On Wednesday, Morvaji's lesson about the lore surrounding medieval coats of arms was interrupted by Golden Apple officials and Lake Zurich administrators. They said he energizes students with his hands-on, visual style, including a homemade video about Egyptian history starring Morvaji in a rented pharaoh costume. He produces a year-end video for each student in his class to recap the eras they studied and historic plays they staged.

Morvaji, who lives in Lakemoor, joined the north suburban school four years ago after beginning his career in McHenry School District 15.

Principal Nate Carter said Morvaji was nominated for the award by 6th-grade student Elise Riendeau and her mother, Diane. Officials observed his classes and interviewed his colleagues, students and students' parents before selecting him from a pool of 850 teachers.

"I see the importance of reading and writing, but so much today is video and the immediacy of media. They are used to that and it really plays into how their brain works," Morvaji said.

That approach to teaching was only part of Morvaji's appeal, said Phyllis O'Connell with the Golden Apple Foundation. Beyond history, Morvaji also encourages students to think about how they fit into the world around them.

Students "are learning and absorbing and I don't even think they realize how much they are learning," said O'Connell.

Morvaji graduated from Crystal Lake South High School in 1989. He earned an associate's degree from McHenry County College, then studied history at Northern Illinois University. He holds a master's in education from Concordia University in River Forest.

A Deerfield native, Broos studied music education at Ohio State University. She earned a master's in arts and music education from Northeastern Illinois University. tmalone@tribune.com

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