

Golden Apples for Clarke School

Khan, White surprised in their classrooms

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By **ROBERT FELTON**
Contributing Writer

In a scene reminiscent of the prize patrol vans once used by Publishers Clearing House to surprise unsuspecting sweepstakes winners, two teachers from Michele Clarke Academy Preparatory Magnet School, 5101 W. Harrison, were surprised in similar fashion by the news that they were winners of the Golden Apple Award.

Teachers Samina Khan and Donnell White were unaware of the news when their respective classes began and looked visibly surprised when their regular class assignment was interrupted by the sudden entrance of video cameras, family members and business associates congratulating them on winning the award. The Golden Apple Award, given on behalf of the Golden Apple Foundation, recognizes excellence in teaching both in terms of in-class success and pre-class preparation. This year, the committee is honoring middle school teachers.

Khan teaches science and White teaches math. Khan and White were the only teachers to receive the award from the same school. They were also two of only 10 teachers chosen for the award out of 850 candidates.



Excellence honored: Samina Khan and Donnell White got the news Tuesday that they are Golden Apple Award recipients. Photos by Tanya Harris.



"I'm just speechless," said Khan, as her science class began to clap in unison. "I want to thank God first of all, as well as my colleagues and parents. I will always be the apple of their eye."

"This is like a dream come true," she added. "My father used to say that the most respected professions are teacher, priest and doctor. I feel as though this is the Nobel Prize in my profession. But I couldn't have done it without these great kids."

Student Sierra Mitchum said about her teacher: "She is very approachable and supportive of the students. She's like a second mother. That's why she is so well liked. If we are having problems with our assignments, she will work overtime to assure that we understand the work."

White was equally stunned although his class responded in kind by clapping and cheering in support. "I just want to say how proud I am of the students who have really done the work," said White. "I also want to thank the staff for giving me this opportunity to give back to the West Side."

Following his thank-yous, White added that he still has an unwavering desire to see a new high school open in the Austin community. "The children of our community deserve to have every chance to succeed, and that starts with giving them a new open-enrollment school," said White.

"What I like so much about professor White is the way he gets the entire class involved using games and in-class activities," said student Tononette Sanders. "We really feel involved in the process, and he allows us the opportunity to learn from each other by giving input into the lesson. He doesn't just teach us-he makes us get involved by motivating us to work harder."

The 10 Golden Apple Award recipients receive a tuition-free spring-term sabbatical at Northwestern University, a \$3,000 cash prize, an IBM personal computer, induction into the Golden Apple Academy of Educators, as well as the award itself which will be presented to them during a special ceremony on Sept. 6.

The awards selection committee is comprised of Chicago-area educators. The process of choosing the teachers began last fall with recommendations from middle school faculty members. From there, nominees needed to provide personal essays regarding their methods and goals as educators. Then letters of recommendation from colleagues are assessed and after the number of finalists was narrowed to 31, Golden Apple committee members visited the schools to observe them during in-class sessions. Afterward, members interviewed each principal and selected colleagues, parents and students.

"They both have been just wonderful, and we are very proud of them," said Henry West, principal of Clarke School. "I recommended each of them for the award because I saw the passion in their work, and I saw how positively the children were responding to them." The Golden Apple awards have been presented to outstanding educators since 1986.

Golden Apple bios

Samina Khan was born in Ethiopia to Indian parents but was raised in Nigeria. After obtaining her bachelor's degree in microbiology at Kaduna Polytechnic in Nigeria, she moved to Wisconsin in 1994 where she lived for a year and a half. She moved to Chicago in 1999 and began to pursue a career as an educator. She received her master's degree in education from DePaul University. Since entering the Chicago Public School system via the Global Educators Outreach program, Khan has received several accolades, including the ComEd100 in 2004 and the Drive Award in 2006.

"Both of my parents are teachers, so I saw the impact that I could have on the lives of children as

a teacher," said Khan who has taught at Michele Clarke for six years. "Teaching is not just a profession for me; it is a passion," said Khan. Though her biological family largely still resides overseas, she says she is mother to her spiritual family within the walls of her classroom. Khan resides on the North Side of Chicago.

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Donnell White grew up on the West Side of Chicago. From a young age, he saw the enormous impact male mentors and educators can have on impressionable youth when he was mentored by a teacher while attending Horatio May School.

"When I was getting in trouble in the sixth grade," said the 52-year-old, "George Prescott took me under his wing and motivated me toward aspiring to higher personal standards."

White's decision to enter the ranks of acclaimed educators was actually one that he arrived at later in life. He spent 23 years as a postal worker, about which he joked, "I worked inside the office where they actually went postal."

For years, he suppressed his desire to teach, but every time he passed the elementary school of his youth he became misty-eyed. "After I took leave from my job, my wife really encouraged me to go back to school and pursue my dream."

White did just that, attending Triton College and later Northeastern, where he obtained a degree in education. White has been teaching at Clarke School for six years. He has been married for 20 years to Realtor April White and is the father of four children (two boys and two girls).

Earlier this year, he initiated the program Proud Young Men Club, which is a society of students who mentor each other through positive reinforcement and tutoring. White currently resides in Oak Park.