

Two county teachers are 'Golden'

They're among 10 in state to win teaching prize

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Even though Peter Schreurs and Kristin O'Rourke-Salamanca teach at schools separated by just seven miles, they are now linked forever.

Schreurs and O'Rourke-Salamanca were two of 10 Illinois teachers to receive the 2009 Golden Apple Award Wednesday.



*Red Oak School teacher Kristin O'Rourke-Salamanca of Highland Park reacts after learning she won the Golden Apple award.
(Photo Special to the News-Sun)*

Some 900 teachers from Cook, DuPage, Kane and Will counties were nominated for the award by the Golden Apple committee.

From there, 372 teachers submitted applications who were reduced to 46 for the semifinal round and then to 30 finalists following interviews and classroom observations.

O'Rourke-Salamanca was the first Highland Park Red Oak School teacher to receive the award and the second in the history of North Shore School District 112.

"I was pleasantly surprised when I found out I won," O'Rourke-Salamanca said shortly after being bombarded with praise and congratulatory hugs in her dual language kindergarten classroom that caters to English and Spanish speaking students. "I appreciate the school and families for making this possible."

Before receiving the award O'Rourke-Salamanca was on maternity leave taking care of her newborn son, Liam. She is expected to return to the classroom May 20.

The 35-year-old teacher spent time working in social services and teaching in Peru before settling down in Illinois.

O'Rourke-Salamanca was nominated by Lisa Jaffee-Richter, a parent whose daughter was in her class four years ago.

"I found her to be a teacher with the ability to cater to the individual needs of each student in her classroom," Jaffee-Richter said.

Jaffee-Richter said she was not only impressed with O'Rourke-Salamanca's energy while teaching, but being able to get such young students who speak different languages to understand each other.

"My daughter never came home and complained she could not understand anything. It is like she swoops down and is able to adjust to the students."

O'Rourke-Salamanca does not believe she does anything special that would separate her from any other teacher. But she believes her willingness to include the parents in the development of students as one of the reasons success has come her way.

"I try to work with the whole family and get them involved in the learning experience," she said.

Schreurs, a first-grade teacher Sprague Elementary School in Lincolnshire, was one of the few male teachers to win the Golden Apple at the early childhood level.

"You don't see many men working at this level at all," said Golden Apple representative Gloria Harper. "The students see him as a strong male role model. We have tried to encourage more men to teach at these young kids because they really need it."

Both recipients will be honored at an awards ceremony Sept. 25 at WTTW-Channel 11 in Chicago. They will also receive a \$3,000 stipend, IBM computer, and a tuition-free sabbatical during the spring quarter of 2010 at Northwestern University.