



**Golden Apple**  
*Foundation*  
*All Children Deserve Excellent Teachers*

# Golden Apple Award Winners

## In the News

March 15-16, 2007

*Prepared by Golden Apple Foundation Communications Department  
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**CPS Office o**  
PI**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**March 15, 2007****Three CPS Teachers Named Golden Apple Recipients***Two Others 'Teachers of Distinction'*

Three Chicago Public Schools teachers were awarded the 2007 Golden Apple Award for Teaching Excellence through 12 this week; two others were named Teachers of Distinction, a new award category.

Dana Dotson, a math teacher at Lindblom Math & Science Academy, Sam Dyson, who teaches physics and Payton College Preparatory High School, and Melinda Wilson, a dance teacher at Curie Metropolitan High School, received the award in a surprise visit at school. Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins surprised Dotson and Dyson on Wednesday; Wilson was surprised Wednesday by Ted Oppenheimer of the Oppenheimer Foundation.

The teachers were among 32 Chicago area finalists – 12 from CPS – culled from 803 nominees in the annual award sponsored by the Golden Apple Foundation. The Foundation is dedicated to recognizing and developing excellent teaching. The prestigious award includes a tuition-free fall term sabbatical at Northwestern University, a stipend from Apple, \$3,000, and membership in the Golden Apple Academy, a group of 210 expert teachers – including CPS teachers – who work together to ensure that all children have the excellent teachers they deserve.

John Belcaster, history teacher at Northside College Preparatory High School, and Zakieh Mohammed, English teacher at Roberto Clemente High School, were two of 10 educators named Teachers of Distinction, a new award recognizing and laudable teaching.

The Golden Apple Award winners and Teachers of Distinction will be honored May 12 at an awards ceremony at Regency Chicago; the ceremony will air as a one-hour prime-time special on WTTW/Channel 11.

The Chicago Public Schools is the nation's third largest school system. It includes more than 600 schools and 415,000 students.

Pete Rose antes up: I bet on every game I managed **SPORTS**



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FDA cautions that insomnia-drug users may eat, drive and even have sex without knowing



## A warning to sleeping pill users: Don't sleep and drive

By Jonathan D. Rockoff  
Tribune Newspapers

WASHINGTON — Under pressure from the federal government, drugmakers are revising the labels on Ambien, Lunesta and other popular sleep aids to warn that the pills may result in driving, eating and even having sex while sleeping, health officials said Wednesday.

The makers of the 13 popular medications are also preparing information bulletins for users that will highlight the possibility of bizarre nighttime side effects.

The Food and Drug Administration requested the action to discourage patients from taking higher than recommended doses or combining use with alcohol consumption. Dr. Russell Katz, director of the agency's neurology division, said it had received more than a dozen reports of strange behavior.

"We don't think that these [side effects] are sufficiently frequent that it would cause us to re-evaluate whether or not the drugs should be on the market," he said. "But we do believe the labeling needs to be changed."

The side effects may also include trouble breathing and other severe allergic reactions, Katz said, but it's the strange sleep-time behaviors that have prompted scientific study and attracted national attention.

Patients prescribed Ambien, in particular, have said they woke up to find themselves gorging on food. Some cooked while asleep. Others talked on the telephone while asleep or had sex. Some others learned afterward that they had been behind the wheel of their car during the night, but they had no recollection of driving.

PLEASE SEE SLEEP, PAGE 8

# 9/11 architect confesses

Secret hearing's transcript cites other terror plots

From Tribune news services

WASHINGTON — Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the suspected mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, confessed to that attack and a chilling string of other terror plots during a military hearing at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, according to a transcript released Wednesday by the Pentagon.

"I was responsible for the 9/11 operation from A to Z," Mohammed said in a statement read during the session, which was held Saturday. The transcript also refers to a claim by Mohammed that he was tortured by the CIA, although he said he was not under duress at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo when he confessed to his role in the attacks.

According to the transcript, an Air Force officer read from a 31-point laundry list of operations—some completed, some planned—while Mohammed sat in a hearing room Saturday. Among the unrealized attack targets, according to the confession, was the Sears Tower in Chicago, which was supposed to be assaulted in a "second wave" sometime after Sept. 11, 2001.

Mohammed, 43, confessed to the Sept. 11 attacks and the 1993 World Trade Center attack and to plotting assassination attempts on Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton and Pope John Paul II, the transcript said.

The man who the U.S. says was Osama bin Laden's operative



AP photo  
Khalid Shaikh Mohammed says he was tortured by the CIA, according to the transcripts.

PLEASE SEE TERROR, PAGE 8



Tribune photo by Antonio Perez

## How do they like those Apples? Apparently, a lot.

Rev. Joseph Ekpo of Fenwick High in Oak Park can't keep his feet on the ground after learning he was one of six Chicago-area teachers to win a prestigious Golden Apple Award on Wednesday. At Curie Metropolitan High in Chicago, Melinda Wilson (right) said after her win: "I love my kids, and I want them to realize that there are no limits to what they can achieve in my room." **STORY, PAGE 7**



Tribune photo by Kuni Takahashi

Over five decades, philosopher argued the need for a religious dimension in discussions of public policy, history and social sciences

## Prof's 'spiritual hunger' pays off

By Manya A. Brachear  
Tribune religion reporter

For nearly a half-century, Charles Taylor has sought to change the conversation about cultural conflict, saying it cannot be solved by economic or political analysis alone. Such clashes, he argues, often spring from hungers of the human spirit.

On Wednesday, the Northwestern University law and philosophy professor was richly rewarded for his intellectual endeavors with a monetary award that exceeds the amount given to Nobel Prize winners. Taylor, 75, will receive \$1.5 million in May from the John Templeton Foundation, which

awards cutting-edge research in science and spirituality and progress in the marriage of the two.

His work spans a number of topics, including legal ethics, multiculturalism and secularization, but he is best known for critiquing the spiritual poverty of modern academia. Fellow philosophers often explain away spirituality by attributing it solely to materialistic or biological forces, he said, skewing their understanding of human behavior.

"We don't understand what's going on unless we understand that as human beings we are spiritual beings," Taylor said.

PLEASE SEE AWARD, PAGE 6



AP photo by Henry Altstetter  
Northwestern professor Charles Taylor wins the \$1.5 million Templeton Award.

## Latinos lift scores, shrink learning gap

Changes in classroom key, educators say

By Mary Ann Fergus and Darnell Little  
Tribune staff reporters

On a recent morning, the limERIC was the most popular of feuding among 5th graders at Sunny Hill Elementary School during their annual poetry festival.

But the pupils at this predominantly Latino school in Carpentersville aren't only reciting silly Irish rhymes, they also are bridging the achievement gap with white pupils in the high-performing Barrington Community Unit School District 230.

About 80 percent of the pupils at Sunny Hill passed the 2006 Il-

linois Standards Achievement Test, a 16 percentage-point increase over the previous year.

Across Illinois and the nation, the story is much the same: Latino pupils are scoring better on state standardized tests and continuing to catch up to their white peers faster than African-American pupils.

Though critics have charged that last year's state test was easier—causing record-high scores for all Illinois pupils—Latinos experienced double-digit gains, continuing a five-year trend of rising scores.

State and local educators attribute the higher scores to comprehensive changes in the classroom, including new teaching strategies, extra staff and par-

PLEASE SEE LATINOS, PAGE 8

## Unhappy Bush says firings not political

President: Gonzales has 'got work to do'

By Mark Silva  
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — President Bush, his trip to Latin America disrupted by a firestorm over the dismissal of eight federal prosecutors, said Wednesday he is "not happy" with the Justice Department's public explanation of the firings and added that Atty. Gen. Alberto Gonzales has "got work to do" to repair relations with Capitol Hill.

Bush insisted he had not lost confidence in Gonzales, but his attempt to deflect criticism of the White House's involvement in the firing of the U.S. attorneys last year is likely to increase pressure on the attorney general, a longtime friend from Texas, who faces calls for resignation from leading members of Congress.

That pressure was ratcheted up late in the day when Sen. John Sununu of New Hampshire became the first congressional Republican to publicly urge Bush to fire Gonzales. "I think the president should replace him," Sununu said in a statement.

The president, who signed off on the Justice Department's dismissal of the federal prosecutors, maintained that he did not get involved in whether to fire individual prosecutors. "U.S.

PLEASE SEE GONZALES, PAGE 6

### INSIDE

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Chicago backs up Olympic bid  
Aldermen approve the \$500 million guarantee.

3 killed in crash on Lower Wacker  
College students were on spring break.

### WORLD

U.S. cautious on Iraq success  
Some killings drop under security plan. **PAGE 5**

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## City Room™ Public Affairs coverage from our award-winning staff

### HEADLINES

## Teacher Voted a Good Apple

**A suburban teacher is honored with a prestigious award.**

A local suburban high school teacher has been honored with a Golden Apple Award.

Golden Apples are like the "Oscars" for teaching. They recognize teachers for a job well-done.

Recipient Aaron Becker teaches history at Evanston Township high school.

Becker: I feel like a, like a coach who's kind of going out on the shoulders of my colleagues and my students, you know after a game. It's like it's not me that did it, it's everyone else around me as well.

Becker wins a fall sabbatical at Northwestern University, three-thousand dollars and a laptop computer.

Over 800 teachers from nearby counties were nominated for the Golden Apple, and only 10 teachers win the award every year.

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## ETHS Teacher 'Golden'

March 15, 2007

By **KAREN BERKOWITZ** Staff Writer

Teacher Aaron Becker didn't plan on becoming fodder for conservative talk radio in 2005, but his passion for providing students a many-sided perspective on the Middle East and its peoples thrust him into that role.

In his global studies course on the Middle East, students adopt an identity for one semester - that of a Syrian banker or a medical student in Qatar, for instance - and are asked to bring that perspective to class discussions.

» [Click to enlarge image](#)



**Evanston High School teacher Aaron Becker (center) receives a Golden Apple award Wednesday from WTTW's Christian Farr (left) as Principal Marilyn Madden (right) applauds. (Buzz Orr/Staff Photographer)**

Students stage mock Iraqi elections and gain insight into the region's many conflicts through role-playing - all of which prompted Rush Limbaugh to go on a rant against "multiculturalists", after the school's acclaimed global studies program was featured in a Christian Science Monitor story entitled, "A Classroom as Big as the World".

On Wednesday, Becker was back in the media spotlight, this time as the winner of a coveted Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching.

"Aaron is simply amazing," said Jennifer Fisher-Isquierdo, chair of the history department. "He has no desks in his classroom, but has

rugs on the floor and low benches for students sit on. He offers tea to his students and the atmosphere is set. Students feel safe, comfortable and ready to learn.

"His approach to instruction is totally student-centered and he is constantly reflecting on his practice to improve his teaching," said Fisher-Isquierdo.

Now in his eighth year at ETHS, Becker, a 38-year-old Skokie native, teaches courses in the Middle East: Past and Present; African History and Culture and Advanced Placement U.S. History.

To better understand the region and its peoples, he spent the summer of 2001 in Turkey visited Saudi Arabia with other U.S. high school teachers at the invitation of Saudi Aramco working to improve the image of Saudi Arabia and Islam in the west in the aftermath of 9/11.

Before Becker embarked on his Saudi trip, students created a 15-minute video documer Saudi Arabian high school students.

On his return, his own students learned that Saudi teens dine at Kentucky Fried Chicken popular chain of hair accessory shops also found in U.S. shopping malls.

As one of 10 winners of a 2007 Golden Apple, Becker will receive a tuition-free fall sabbatical computer, \$3,000, and membership in the Golden Apple Academy of Educators, which r

Other ETHS teachers who have received Golden Apple awards include Vanessa Woods

### VIDEO ::



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## Teacher's travels turn into riveting lessons

### Evanston history instructor wins Golden Apple Award

By Lisa Black, Tribune staff reporter. Tribune reporter Tracy Dell'Angela contributed to this report

March 15, 2007

On any given day, you can find history teacher Aaron Becker sitting on a rug, cross-legged, his students surrounding him in a classroom rich with Middle Eastern culture, from ornate drapes and pillows to world maps and religious icons.

Most students remove their shoes, and some sip freshly brewed hot tea that Becker has prepared before he leads them in discussion on the global politics of oil or shares what he has learned during trips abroad.

His innovative techniques and dedication to his students at Evanston Township High School earned him one of the 10 Golden Apple Awards for Excellence in Teaching for 2007.

On Wednesday, Becker, 38, of Chicago, learned the news when school officials, reporters and students packed his classroom to hear the announcement made by Glenn "Max" McGee, chairman of the Golden Apple Foundation board. Becker beamed amid the cheers and said he felt as if he had already been richly rewarded when he was nominated earlier this year. At that time, officials from the foundation observed his class.

"You guys were so amazing and made me so proud," he told his students to several rounds of applause.

"This is the icing on the cake," said Becker, who, by the end of class, had called his mom to tell her the good news.

Peter Brody, 18, a senior, stopped by the class to see what the commotion was all about.

"Mr. Becker is awesome," Brody said, giving the teacher a hug. "You can tell he absolutely loves the subjects he teaches."

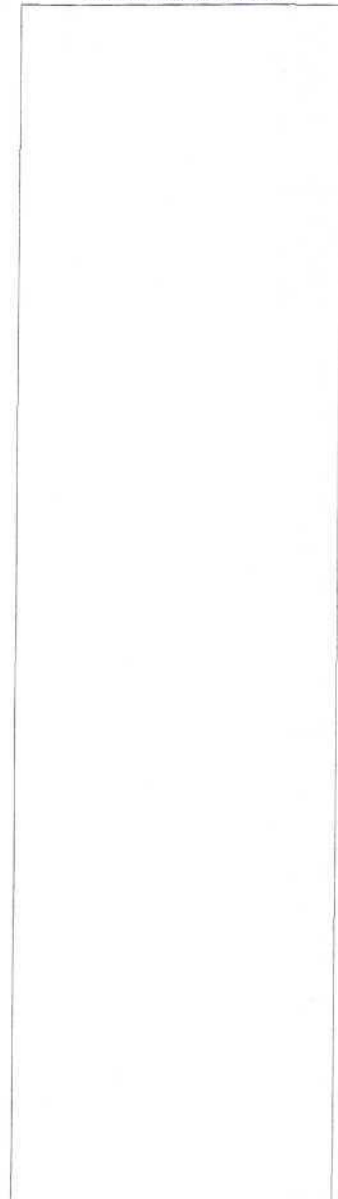
Becker, who was a student teacher for a year at the Evanston school before being hired in 1998, was among 24 U.S. educators chosen to participate in a 10-day study tour of Saudi Arabia last fall.

He often travels in the summer, interviewing and videotaping students on the street--from places including Istanbul, Dakar and Cairo, for example--so that he can share the videos with his students, Becker wrote in an e-mailed response to questions.

"I ask them what they do for fun, who their favorite NBA player is, what they're looking for in their future spouse," Becker wrote. "You know, things that normal people would really like to know.

"I also bring back cool threads from all the countries I visit. Sometimes I wear them, and sometimes my students model them."

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Sabrina Ehmke, a history teacher who looks to Becker as her informal mentor, described him as open to learning from his students.

"He still maintains that respect but is able to hang out on the ground with them and learn," she said.

Five other teachers learned they had won the award Wednesday.

At Curie Metropolitan High School in Chicago, teacher Melinda Wilson said she would not have been standing in front of her dance class if she hadn't been bitten by a stray dog a decade ago.

The nasty bite convinced her that she didn't have the stomach to be a doctor, so she turned to another love--teaching dance--and spent the next nine years pushing her students to new heights at Curie.

The other winners include:

Samuel Dyson, a physics teacher at Peyton College Prep in Chicago, who organized a two-way exchange with a South African school.

David Derbes, a Chicago physics teacher from the University of Chicago Lab High, who teaches his students to challenge scientific truths and view the world with a skeptical eye.

John Naisbitt, a Hinsdale Central High teacher who found his calling by building the confidence of his least motivated students.

Joseph Ekpo, who teaches history, ethics and moral theology to his students at Fenwick High in Oak Park.

Three more teachers will receive awards Thursday. At Lake Forest Academy, fine arts teacher Gina Williams was surprised last week with the honor because her school is on spring break this week.

A total of 803 high school teachers from Cook, Lake, Will, Kane and DuPage Counties were nominated for the award, which was first presented in 1986.

The 32 finalists were chosen in January. They were observed in their classrooms, and interviews were conducted with their principals, colleagues, students and students' parents.

Each Golden Apple Award winner will receive a free fall-term sabbatical at Northwestern University, a personal computer, \$3,000 and membership in the Golden Apple Academy of Educators.

The winners will be honored at the annual awards ceremony May 12 in the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

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EDUCATION :: PRINTER FRIENDLY » EMAIL ARTICLE »     **Fenwick priest wins teaching honor****'I try to make students hopeful about life'**

March 15, 2007

BY KATE N. GROSSMAN Education Reporter

In 1989, an idealistic Roman Catholic priest sat in a Nigerian prison, wondering if he would die for his beliefs.

He escaped and found refuge in Chicago, eventually becoming a beloved theology teacher at Oak Park's Fenwick High.

» Click to enlarge image



**The Rev. Joseph Ekpo, a theology teacher at Fenwick High School in Oak Park, jumps for joy after learning he has won a Golden Apple Award from Brigid Duffy Gerace, a former winner. (STNG)**

**RELATED STORIES**

- That's the spirit: NU prof awarded \$1.5 mil.

"It's more than just memorizing Bible verses," said junior Jill Olszewski. "He's teaching us values we can use in our lives every day."

Ekpo is one of 10 Chicago area Golden Apple winners. Winners receive a sabbatical at Northwestern, an Apple computer and \$3,000. Other winners include a Payton College Prep physics teacher who also teaches Zulu; history teachers at Evanston and Hinsdale Central high schools; a University of Chicago Lab Schools physics teacher and a Curie High dance teacher. Three more will be named today.

**'God has given me a lot'**

Ekpo, 45, said he was imprisoned because of his involvement with a group fighting a government push to make Nigeria an Islamic state. He learned from his father, also a teacher, the value of giving to others.

"God is speaking to me through the Golden Apple and my students," said Ekpo, a small man with a booming voice. "God has given me a lot of knowledge and love in my heart, and I share it."

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# Chicago Tribune

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## First Golden Apple for suburban high school

By Steve Schmadeke  
Special to the Tribune

March 15, 2007, 8:12 PM CDT

As a physical education teacher, Kraig Conyer has heard the cracks about the supposedly undemanding nature of his profession.

But he had the last laugh Thursday when he became Hinsdale South High School's first Golden Apple Award winner and just the fifth PE instructor among the 220 teachers ever to win the prestigious teaching award.

Conyer, 29, in his sixth year running the Darien school's PE program for special-needs students, was honored for his extraordinary ability to motivate and inspire kids. Conyer seemed stunned as he stepped out of a school bus—he'd arranged to take his third-period class bowling Thursday—and found the traditional shrink-wrapped basket of apples thrust in his hands.

But he made sure all 10 students—including some in wheelchairs—were off the two buses before joining the small crowd gathered to congratulate him inside the school.

"Everyone said this is a happier and more inclusive place because Kraig is here," said Gary Sircus, program coordinator for alternative teacher certification at Northwestern University and a member of the Golden Apple selection committee. "When he came, he really brought [adaptive PE] out of its corner and made it very much a part of the regular PE department."

"He's awesome; he's my inspiration," said Kristen McInerney, 18, a senior with Down syndrome who nominated him for the award. "There's a lot of things about him that I appreciate him for. He inspires me—he was the basketball coach my freshman year and he would give us tips."

Conyer launched the school's Special Olympics program in 2001, and he also coaches the school's varsity baseball team and is an assistant football coach. He thought his jock status might nix his chances.

"I'll be honest with you. I thought it was going to be more difficult for me," Conyer said, "and that's why this feels so great. Not just for me but for the PE department here and physical educators everywhere."

His classroom goal is to help students feel they are part of something larger and to push them to stretch their abilities.

"It gives them another way to feel that they're part of the school—that they're Hinsdale South Hornets," he said. "For our students who are not as high functioning, a lot of it is social. They do work hard, they know I have high expectations."

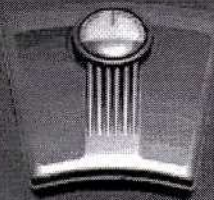
Other students have benefited from knowing Conyer, said Principal Claudia Geocarlis. A handful, known as peer partners, help out in his classes and several have been inspired to earn degrees in special education.

"He has a heart and soul for students," Geocarlis said. "He sees what they can be and says, 'I believe in you and you can do this. Let's make it happen.'"

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Conyer's wife, Maria, is a Hinsdale South biology teacher, and the couple have a 4-month-old daughter, Juliana.

A total of 803 teachers from Cook, Lake, Will, Kane and DuPage Counties were nominated for the award, first presented in 1986.

Conyer was among three teachers honored Thursday in the city and suburbs. The others were Danna Dotson, a math teacher at Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago, and David Eanes, a music teacher at Thornridge High School in Dolton. Seven other teachers were named earlier this week and last week.

Each of the 10 winners receives a tuition-free fall-term sabbatical at Northwestern University; a personal computer; \$3,000; and membership in the Golden Apple Academy of Educators, which now has inducted 210 teachers.

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