



## Saluting excellence in the classroom

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Few would disagree that these are tough times for education in Illinois.

Thousands of teachers have been laid off in recent weeks as area school districts trim expenses amid the state's threatened \$1.3 billion cut in education funding for the coming academic year.

And, at the center of the budget crisis is the General Assembly's mismanagement of the public education pension system that has wrongly placed educators in the crosshairs of angry taxpayers.

Lost in the heated debate on those emotional topics is some of the stellar work done in classrooms across the suburbs.

That's why we devote this space today to salute this year's winners of the vaunted Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching. Of the 10 winners, we're proud to say two of those selected hail from our coverage area.

Darshan Jain, a geometry and pre-calculus instructor at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, and Susan Harsa, a French teacher at St. Francis High School in Wheaton, were chosen from a field of 562 Chicago-area nominees.

The Golden Apple, now in its 25th year, recognizes and honors "outstanding teachers for their contributions to building a stronger, better-educated citizenry," according to the Golden Apple Foundation.

The winners will get a tuition-free, six-month sabbatical to study at Northwestern University. They also receive a \$3,000 cash award and membership in the Golden Apple Academy of Educators, which has inducted 250 teachers.

What Jain, Harsa and the other winners have in common is they bring a unique brand of energy, enthusiasm and creativity to the classroom.

"We have great teachers in our building," St. Francis Principal Raeann Huhn said. "But she (Harsa) is one who has a great connection to everyone - whether it's students in her class, her colleagues, parents. She's just a personable woman who really cares about all people."

Golden Apple judges said Jain creates an atmosphere that engages Stevenson students in something more than just learning math facts.

"He is purposeful, precise and thoughtful," officials said in a statement. "Realizing the need for mutual camaraderie in his classroom, Jain doesn't believe his job is simply to deliver knowledge, but rather to be an active participant in the learning process along with his students."

True, they have achieved something great - the award makes them rock stars in the education world - but Jain, Harsa and the other winners understand it's not about them.

"At the end of the day, it's the work of the students that matters," Jain said in accepting his award. "It's the cooperation between parents, teachers and the students."

We couldn't have said it better.