

# The WheatonSun

## A 'golden' moment

### St. Francis High School instructor wins prestigious teaching award

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By HANK BECKMAN For Sun-Times Media

Sue Harsa knew after her first baby-sitting job that she wanted to work with children.

In high school, her favorite teacher taught English. At Mt. St. Scholastica College in Kansas her favorite teacher taught French. When she informed Sue that she had an aptitude for the subject, her life's course was set.

Harsa on May 11 became the first faculty member at St. Francis High School in Wheaton to win a Golden Apple Award for excellence in teaching.

"Oh my God, who are all these people," she said as a platoon of colleagues, Golden Apple Award officials and media invaded her classroom. "This is so overwhelming ... it's beyond anything I ever dreamed of."

The Golden Apple Academy is celebrating its 25th year of recognizing excellence in teaching in the Chicago area. Harsa joins 10 other teachers being recognized this year, all of whom will be honored at a black-tie event Oct. 15 at the WTTW/Channel 11 studios.

In addition, honorees will receive a tuition-free, six-month program where they can study at Northwestern University. They are also elevated to the status of Golden Apple "fellows" and rewarded with \$3,000 in cash.

Harsa said she hadn't had time to think about how she would spend her time on sabbatical, only that it would be "something to make me a better teacher."

After the ceremony, she shared her thoughts on her career and her success as a teacher.

While one might think that 40 years of teaching would be enough for even the most dedicated educator, Harsa shows no signs of slowing down and isn't even thinking about retirement.

Among the biggest challenges facing the modern educator, Harsa identified two: staying on top of technology, or "saying current," as she put it, and instilling passion in her students.

"I want them to come away with a passion for the subject and recognize the fact that they can learn a foreign language," she said.

Harsa noted the more collaborative method of teaching in the modern classroom.

"A teacher always has to be a student," she said, in order "to tap into the spirit of students."

Colleagues spoke of Harsa with pride and admiration.

"I'm so happy for her," said Michelle Garesche, a St. Francis language arts teacher. "She's the nicest person and the best boss and colleague I've ever had."

Art teacher Tia Holinger echoed Garesche's sentiments.

"This is fabulous, exciting and well-deserved," she said, "She has a love for her students."

St. Francis Principal Raeann Huhn said she was "overwhelmed and filled with pride. The amount of people here shows the love for her."

Among those people were family members, husband Joe, who said he was "in heaven," and son Carey, who was "ecstatic ... it's amazing to see."

But the best testimonials came from Harsa's students.

"I'm really proud of her," said junior Lauren Gorski. "She's been important in my life."

Alex Berger, also a junior, agreed, saying Harsa had "other life lessons" to offer her students.

Junior Greg Gushurst stressed the fun to be had in Harsa's class.

"Every class is fun, but even though it's fun, you are still learning a lot," he said.

And Harsa loves her students and St. Francis.

"To be the first St. Francis teacher to win this award means a lot to me," she said. "This award is for all of St. Francis."