



South Hill First Grade Teachers Receive Innovative Science Teaching Award

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South Hill Elementary School's three first grade teachers; Patti Caughey, Nancy Marino, and Kathleen White; were honored with the Raymond C. Loehr Innovative Science Teaching Award at the Ithaca City School District (ICSD) Convocation for all staff members on September 2. Managed by the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI), the award was presented by Loehr's son Stephen Yale-Loehr and Ann Caren, IPEI board member and Awards Committee Chair.

Raymond Loehr's family initiated the teaching award at the time of his 70th birthday in honor of his career as a science educator. It has been presented to nine different teachers from Ithaca's elementary and secondary schools. A second award in his honor is presented each June to a student who excels in environmental science.

The team of teachers was nominated for the award by South Hill Principal Samantha Little.

"During the 2013-14 school year, their first grade classes participated in a year-long integrated teaching and learning experience focusing on farms and demystifying the journey of providing healthy food from the farm to the table, for all people," she said. "'Farm to Table: Healthy Food for all People' included enriching and empowering experiences that engaged the students. Their passion and commitment to providing project-based and experiential learning opportunities for all students was reflected in their thoughtful planning and execution of the curriculum they designed."

Little also reflected on the teaching team's activities: "This kind of innovative and creative instructional practice is a labor of love. Each of these teachers looked deep within their instructional practices and developed a collaborative inquiry process. Their dream very quickly turned into reality due to their dedication, love and passion for teaching. I am honored to work alongside this team and I have great respect and appreciation for their work and contributions to our school community."



Caughey, Marino and White used an IPEI Community Collaboration Grant to facilitate their program. Key community collaborators were Katie Bigness of NYS Agriculture in the Classroom at Cornell, and Jerry Dietz of Taste of the Nation. Many local food producers were also involved as the year-long program integrated reading, writing, science, social studies, and math as well as physical education, music, and library curriculum with field trips. Family involvement was encouraged for activities and field trips as well as for evening cooking classes. Students made products and sold them at Taste of the Nation in June; these funds were used to donate to fight childhood hunger.

When Caren announced the award, she described how this "collaborative teaching and learning model afforded students rigor, relevance and the development of relationships within and outside of the South Hill community." Over the course of the school year, each month had a different focus: apples, honeybees and corn in the fall. In the winter, they focused on beans and then the lives of migrant farm workers, including a study of the life of Cesar Chavez and his advocacy and passion for improving the lives of farm workers. Next the students visited the Cornell Dairy where they got to witness firsthand the milk production process and later at the Cooperative Extension kitchen cooking class where they explored healthy dairy options.

In May and June, students studied seeds and grew seedlings, working closely with Dan Brangman, master gardener at Cooperative Extension, and then with Dan Flerlage from LACS to build a garden at South Hill. The garden consists of several small raised beds where the children grew crops that were harvested at the end of the school year and eaten during a family gathering in June.

A culminating experience for the first graders was their participation at Taste of the Nation on June 17, where they talked with event attendees about their experiences and sold their work, which included ceramic trivets, healthy food recipe booklets and layered bean soup-in-a-jar mixes. They raised \$742.00 which they presented to the organizers of the event to support the fight against childhood hunger.

"The results of this experience have both short term and long-term effects," Caren said. "While the first grade teachers impacted the first grade students and their families directly, they have also modeled and led efforts in our community to demonstrate how and what can be done to engage students in an interdisciplinary curriculum where students' creativity is etched into the fabric of the instruction."

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