

Outstanding teacher has humor down to science

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Power Middle School science and math teacher Dale Green refuses to be the butt of jokes. He's usually on the front end of them.

Here's a Green specialty: What is osmosis? Responds the teacher with Amazing Carnac-like repartee: "What the man said when he came down from the mountain with two tablets . . . f-a-z-m-o-s-e."

Ta dum.
Green might be something of a cutup, but his students piece together a wealth of knowledge in his classroom. He takes a personal approach, reaching as many kids as he can to make learning fun.

That's part of the reason he was selected both the Farmington Public Schools and Newsweek-WDIV-TV Oakland County middle school teacher of the year. Green and other winners will be honored in a special banquet in May at the Roostertail.

Green is overwhelmed and surprised with the double-dip ac-

■ 'All I wanted to do was to teach kids the best I could.'

Dale Green

Power Middle School science, math teacher

colade. He didn't enter teaching 26 years ago to become a highly decorated educator, though.

"All I wanted to do was to teach kids the best I could," Green said.

That means becoming a friend or confidant. Sometimes it calls for picking the kid who doesn't have his hand up, or taking two minutes of time to find out an interest — anything to draw them into the learning fray.

Humor goes a long way. "My favorite thing about watching him teach is that kids will give 100 percent of themselves because they want to please him," said Power principal Laura Miner. "He's kind of magic."

Green makes them laugh and makes them wonder.

The osmosis joke, for instance,

helps them remember the word. More than likely, they'll also crack open a science book to find what it really means.

(According to the dictionary, osmosis is the movement of a solvent through a semipermeable membrane into a solution of higher concentration that tends to equalize the concentrations of solute on the two sides of the membrane.)

"Basically, I try to assist kids in learning and let them know I'm behind them, helping them to learn rather than in front of them demanding that they learn," Green said. "At this age group, you have to be an ally for them."

Green has come to that conclusion through 26 years teaching in the Farmington district. He started at Ten Mile Elementary

School and Middlebelt Elementary before moving onto East Middle School where he taught for 10 years.

He's been at Power Middle School for 16 years. His wife of 26 years, Karen, also teaches at Power. They have a son, 15.

There was a time when the teacher of the year was more interested in playing notes than taking them. Green wanted to become a professional musician as a saxophone player.

Then, recalled Green: "A voice inside me said, 'Get real.'"

Instead of his muse, he followed his instincts and became a teacher.

He still plays the sax. In fact, he has the instrument tucked away in a classroom closet.

Once in awhile, Green thinks about pulling it out for an impromptu concert.

"It might scare them a little bit," he said.

Besides, Green has learned there are more rewards in teaching kids how to toot their own horn.



Science with humor: Dale Green teaches life science class with a touch of humor as he crowns student Kamino Draghici with the help of Michelle Kirsch.

Educator adds spice, sauce to 'specialty'

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

When it came to science as a student, Becky Waters felt more like H₂O under the sun's intense rays: She wanted to evaporate.

The study of minerals and solar systems wasn't her cup of tea.

So, there's more than a twist of irony to the Wood Creek Elementary teacher drawing her third-graders gleefully, like a magnet in a nail factory, to science.

"I didn't like it (as a student)," Waters said. "That's why it's my specialty."

Waters goes out of her way to spice up the subject, going beyond the traditional mineral chart and microscope methods of teaching. She developed a classroom project where kids made their own barbecue sauce. The recipe was later bottled and sold with proceeds going to Farmington Neighborhood House.

Her students have turned the classroom into a tropical rain forest, including sound effects. Student-made jelly fish dangle from the ceiling, the result of an ongoing study of oceans.

"Both of my kids love science because of her," said parent Kim Fraser, whose two children, Michael and Melissa, have been in Waters' classroom. "They do all kinds of hands-on projects. We have crystals she (Melissa) brought home sitting in our window."

Such creativity has led Waters to be selected as both the Farmington Public Schools Elementary Teacher of the Year and the Newsweek-WDIV Oakland County Outstanding Elementary Teacher of the Year. She will be honored in May along with other winners in a special ceremony rebroadcast on WDIV.

The double honor is a remarkable achievement, especially considering Waters has only been teaching 4½ years.

Then again, she was reared in something of a school house. Her father Horace Waters was a long-time principal at Redford Union High; her mother Marcia is a kindergarten teacher.

"For awhile, I said 'no way I'd ever go into education,'" Waters said. "As I got older, I realized that was my calling. I found I worked well with children."

Waters grew up in Farmington Hills, attending Alameda, O.E. Duncel and North Farmington where she graduated in 1984. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Michigan State.

Her teaching career had another curve ball of irony: Waters replaced her first-grade teacher when she was hired.

"She took one look at me and said it was time to retire," Waters said.

Waters being a product of



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMIEUX

Farmington schools makes teacher of the year honors even more of a thrill. She's received congratulations from people around the district, including her eighth-grade English teacher Estralee Michaelson who is now director of the district's health curriculum.

Waters, who wants to be a principal someday, serves on several school and district committees. She's on the curriculum council, frameworks and assessment committees.

She also reads up on new trends in education. Teaching rewards go beyond those bestowed from educational circles.

Waters gets a kick out of the kids. She marvels at what they grasp.

"I had a kid run in with geodes he had found. Another one brought in a tool to crack them open," Waters said. "They took what they've learned outside into their world and brought it back into the classroom."



William Harmon



Mary Jo Williams

Art teacher draws on students' creativity

The old saying, you've got to have art hits home at Harrison High School. The person drumming the message is William Harmon, Farmington Public Schools High School Teacher of the Year.

Harmon has been in the Farmington district since 1966, previously serving as a teacher in the Detroit Public Schools for five years.

Through the years, Harmon has been a main catalyst in helping

students tap their creativity. Many have won local and state art awards; some have gone on to receive full-tuition scholarships at the Center for Creative Studies and Antioch College.

Harmon, who earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Wayne State University, serves as a member of the Harrison School Improvement Team and chairs a North Central Accreditation committee.

doesn't stop there.

Staff members credit Williams for helping computerize Eagle's media center into the Winnebago system, removing old coding labels and installing new codes on many of the 12,000 volumes in the library collection.

Williams helps on several building and social committees at the school. She organizes and participates in the all-school talent show and started Eagle's annual "Adopt-a-Family" campaign.

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