

A winner

William Grace special education teacher honored

Editor's note: This is the first of three stories about teachers who have been honored as Farmington Public Schools' teachers of the year.

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER
tsmith@ee.homeschool.net

When Vitas Underys was notified that he was named Farmington Public Schools' Elementary School Teacher of the Year, he probably wondered how big the plaque would be. Not for ego, or anything like that. He sincerely considers his successful special education program at William Grace Elementary School a "group effort." If it were up to the 13-year veteran of the district, he'd make sure there was room on the plaque for names of all of the teachers, paraprofessionals and parents who have helped his program work.

"I feel it's a great honor for the building, the classroom, the paraprofessionals," said the personable, pony-haired teacher. "I had no idea it was ever happening. It's nice to get the appreciation."

Underys received his award at Tuesday night's school board meeting.

The four main paraprofessionals who Underys cited as crucial to the SXI program for severely multiply impaired youngsters (who have more than one physical impairment) are Nancy Benglian, Shatha Fatoohi, Linda Hildinger and Lisa Tocco.

Under the direction of Underys, in his 10th year at William Grace, SXI students are included with general education students in everyday classroom lessons and activities. The teacher strives to make sure that there is little or no distinction made between SXI and other students.

It is a focus that parents notice and appreciate.

"There's best practices here. It's a very well-deserved honor," said parent Carolyn Das of Farmington Hills, whose son, Stephen, is one of Underys' pupils. "It's a great program here and everyone contributes."

Underys has many other irons in the fire, too. He is a member of the Galileo Leadership Academy, Elumion For Inclusion Forum, North Central Accreditation Conflict Resolution and is among leaders in the district's elementary study.

In addition, he is active in his Lithuanian church and is a volunteer for the Ark in Ann

"Through Vitas' efforts, students from the SXI classroom have become active participants and valued members of our school community. He challenges his students and the rest of the William Grace community to question their own assumptions about what the kids in the SXI classroom are capable of, if given the chance."

wrote Anne Hills

—William Grace teacher

TEACHER OF THE YEAR

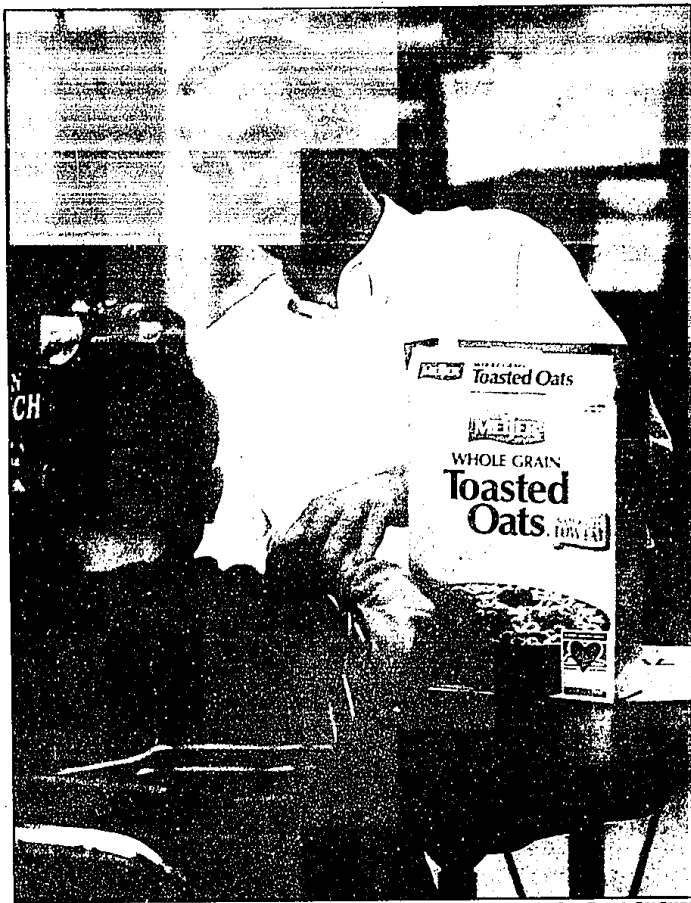
Arbor, a theater for musicians.

"Through Vitas' efforts, students from the SXI classroom have become active participants and valued members of our school community," writes Anne Hill, a William Grace teacher. "He challenges his students and the rest of the William Grace community to question their own assumptions about what the kids in the SXI classroom are capable of, if given the chance."

A parent of a student in Vitas' classroom said, "This outstanding teacher comes with a bonus quality which is his wonderful, whimsical, unique sense of humor that puts smiles on faces all over William Grace."

The district teachers of the year were entered in the Newsweek-WDIV Outstanding Teacher Awards program coordinated in part by Oakland Schools. Besides Underys, honored Farmington teachers include East Middle School's Mary Ellen Thompson and Harrison High School's Susan Schultz, who won the district's middle school and high school awards, respectively.

(Editor's note: Look for a feature article about Underys' SXI program in an upcoming issue of the Farmington Observer.)



Honored: Vitas Underys teaches life skills to special education students.

Want a hot new job? Call the Hills fire department

BY JONI HUBBARD
STAFF WRITER
jhubbard@ee.homeschool.net

Area residents will have a chance at one of the hottest jobs around as the Farmington Hills Fire Department begins its recruiting process next month.

Bob Rebtoy, assistant to the fire chief, said an informational meeting will be held at 7 p.m. on April 13, at Fire Department headquarters, 31455 11 Mile Road. After a brief presentation by Chief Rich Marinucci and others, those who attend will have the chance to ask Hills firefighters about their jobs, one on one.

The positions aren't full-time; firefighters will be paid for each call to which they respond.

"It's a good chance to make some pretty decent side money, and it's a chance to help your neighbors and friends," Rebtoy

said.

Paid-on-call personnel respond when the dispatch center receives a call for emergency assistance. The majority of calls are medical, but could include structure fires, grass or brush fires and hazardous materials spills.

The department needs about 20 additional people to staff four satellite stations in the four corners of the city. Each is staffed with between 18 and 25 firefighters. Fire administration and most of the full-time firefighters are housed at Fire Station No. 5, at 11 Mile and Orchard Lake roads.

"The numbers are getting down at some of the stations," Rebtoy said. "We're trying to head off a potential problem."

Volunteers don't have to live right near a station; in fact,

some live just across the border in neighboring communities. However, those who live closer in are able to respond more quickly.

"If you live more than a couple of miles away, you never get a chance to get in on the emergencies and use your training," Rebtoy explained. "The more involved you get, the more money you make and the more fun you have."

Training takes 10 to 12 weeks, and Rebtoy said no one should be intimidated by the prospect. Men and women age 18 or older, who are in good physical condition and have a good employment and driving record are welcome to apply.

To learn more about becoming a paid-on-call firefighter, attend the informational meeting or call 426-4400.



Baker opens in Birmingham

Japanese storyteller arrives

On Thursday, March 30 and Friday, March 31, Japanese storyteller Hiroko Fujita will be telling stories at Beechview, Eagle and Gill elementary schools and Highmeadow Common Campus. In her sixth American tour as a storyteller, Fujita, a native of Fukushima Prefecture, Japan, tells traditional country tales, animal fables, comic adventures and old-time family life stories. Each story begins with a brief synopsis in English followed by an entertaining dramatization in Fukushima dialect Japanese. Fujita varies the program with traditional children's songs and old-time games.

A kindergarten teacher and elementary media specialist, Fujita speaks to all audiences about the importance of old stories and games in preserving cultural roots, reinforcing bonds between generations and laying the groundwork for literacy. She also is one of this year's Michigan Reading Association presenters.

Fujita's presentation schedule is as follows:

■ Thursday, March 30, Gill Elementary School: 9:10 a.m. grades 3-5, cafeteria; 10:16-11 a.m. grades K-2, media center.

■ Thursday, March 30, Eagle Elementary School: 12:45-1:30 p.m. grades K-2, media center; 1:45-2:45 p.m. grades 3-5, media center.

■ Friday, March 31, Highmeadow Common Campus: 9:15-10 a.m. grades 1-3, cafeteria; 10:30-11:30 a.m. grades 3-5, cafeteria.

■ Friday, March 31, Beechview Elementary School: 1:15-2 p.m. grades K-2, gymnasium; 2:15-3 p.m. grades 3-5, gymnasium.

Parents at Beechview and Eagle Elementary Schools are preparing a Japanese lunch for Fujita and Fran Stallings, Fujita's American translator and traveling companion.

For more information, call Carole Kersten, Eagle Elementary School media specialist, at 248-489-3687.

Earth Angels to perform at fund-raising hop

The teen performing group Earth Angels will perform at a sock-hop fund-raiser, 6-10 p.m. Saturday at the William Costick Activities Center on 11 Mile Road in Farmington Hills.

In addition to the group's performances, there will be dancing and games, raffle and door prizes. Admission is \$8 for

adults and \$6 for children ages six and under. For that price, there will be all-you-can-eat pizza, soft drinks, coffee and dessert.

Event spokeswoman Bonnie Murphy said this year's Earth Angels, under the direction of Lisa Campen, features 10 boys and 10 girls, between ages nine-

15. The group, which relies on fund-raisers to pay for concert trips at nursing homes and for community groups, sings and dances to vintage rock and roll music.

The Costick Center is located on the north side of 11 Mile, east of Middlebelt. Call (734) 326-5469 for more information.

BAKER BIRMINGHAM FURNITURE, FABRIC AND ACCESSORIES
34500 WOODWARD AVE 248.593.9608