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Minnesota Teacher Receives \$25,000 National Milken Educator Award

Carolyn Ruhnow of Lino Lakes received the “Oscars of Teaching” during surprise ceremonies

Minneapolis, MN (November 16, 2010)— A seemingly routine schoolwide assembly turned into the surprise of a lifetime when the Milken Family Foundation honored—and stunned—Carolyn Ruhnow, a 5th grade teacher at Rice Lake Elementary School, with a Milken Educator Award. One of education’s most prestigious recognitions, each Award comes with a no-strings-attached cash prize of \$25,000. Dr. Jane Foley, Foundation Senior Vice President, Milken Educator Awards, and Alice Seagren, Minnesota’s Commissioner of Education, were among the leaders participating in the surprise celebration.

Dubbed “the Oscars of teaching” by Teacher Magazine, the Milken Educator Awards program was conceived by Lowell Milken to recognize the importance of outstanding educators and encourage talented young people to enter the teaching profession. Unlike most teaching awards, the Milken Educator Awards have no formal nomination or application process. Each year exceptional teachers, principals and specialists—recommended without their knowledge by a blue-ribbon panel appointed by each state’s department of education—are surprised with the news of their awards.

“Our society’s most important profession is teaching, as it informs all others,” said Lowell Milken, chairman and co-founder of the Milken Family Foundation. “We created the Milken Educator Awards to proclaim in a very public way that greatness in education must be recognized and rewarded. Jennifer Mitchell embodies this message intended for entire communities, policymakers, students who may be inspired to enter the profession, and for our nation’s K-12 educators themselves.”

Carolyn Ruhnow’s 5th-grade classroom at Rice Lake Elementary in Lino Lakes, Minn., quite literally goes to the dogs. And that’s perfectly fine with students, parents and co-workers alike. Armed with the philosophy that integrating man’s best friend into the educational environment is a great way to facilitate learning, the innovative educator often takes her own dogs to work with her. Not only do her kids get some fun one-on-one time with the canines, but Ruhnow then integrates the dog/pet theme across the curriculum and enhances it with technology.

She works with a divergent range of students— from non-verbal to twice-gifted—and thanks to her differentiation skills, each one is challenged appropriately. A Fulbright scholar who taught in England for a year, Ruhnow incorporates an array of interdisciplinary units that integrate England, dogs and global education. Moreover, she integrates technology and implements outside curriculum to augment existing teaching strategies. When it comes to student achievement, her kids’ scores were better than 93 percent of other students in reading and 90 percent in math on the Northwest Evaluation Association exam. Eighty-four percent fell at or above the state average on reading and math.

Ruhnow serves as School Growth Facilitator for Q-Comp, a Professional Learning Community (PLC), and sits on many district committees. She readily volunteered to work on the School Improvement/Staff Development Committee to align building goals and professional development with PLC goals. A peer coach, Ruhnow supports the staff in setting Smart Goals, creating appropriate strategies and assessing student learning. Heavily involved in staff development, she also trains teachers in reading and schooled the entire staff in SMART Board technology—yet a sampling of reasons why Carolyn Ruhnow continues to be a headabove the educational pack.

Since first presented in 1987 to a dozen California teachers, the Milken Educator Awards have grown to become the nation's preeminent teacher recognition program, having honored more than 2,500 teachers, principals and specialists with over \$62 million in individual, unrestricted \$25,000 awards. The exponential impact of the more than 2,500 outstanding teachers has helped to reform American K-12 education. The Awards alternate each year between elementary and secondary educators.

Award Criteria:

Candidates for the Milken Educator Awards are selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Exceptional educational talent as evidenced by effective instructional practices and student learning results in the classroom and school.
- Exemplary educational accomplishments beyond the classroom that provide models of excellence for the profession.
- Individuals whose contributions to education are largely unheralded yet worthy of the spotlight.
- Early- to mid-career educators who offer strong long-range potential for professional and policy leadership.
- Engaging and inspiring presence that motivates and impacts students, colleagues and the community.

You can view and download the 2010 Milken Educator Awards Kick-Off YouTube Video.

Take a peek at the surprise of a lifetime that awaits 55 of America's best educators:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXh__cro4sM.

For more information about the Milken Educator Awards, visit <http://www.mff.org> or call the Foundation at (310) 570-4775. You can follow the Foundation at www.twitter.com/milken, www.facebook.com/milkeneducatorawards and at www.youtube.com/milkenaward.

An education reformer for three decades, Lowell Milken created the Milken Educator Awards to recognize exemplary teachers and established TAP™: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement to generate more talented teachers, www.tapsystem.org.

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