

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Contact: Angela Kolczynski, (425) 226-4560

300 Rainier Avenue North
Renton Washington 98057

April 9, 2007

Fifteen Renton teachers recognized for Excellence in Education *Ahead of the Class Awards Ceremony set for Tuesday, May 8*

Six individuals and one team of outstanding Renton teachers have been selected as winners of the 2007 Ahead of the Class Excellence in Education Awards, sponsored by the Renton Chamber of Commerce. Friends, family, students and members of the Renton community will gather to honor these teachers at a special awards ceremony on May 8, from 7:00 – 9:00 pm at the Renton IKEA Performing Arts Center and Renton High School Commons. This year's winners are:

- **Celeste Brady**, ELL Teacher, Hazen High School
- **Kerri Dowd**, Family & Consumer Science, Hazen High School
- **Minerva Erickson**, Title 1, Campbell Hill Elementary School
- **Kelly Feldman**, 1st & 2nd Grade, Kennydale Elementary School
- **Paul Scott**, Technology Education, Sartori Education Center
- **Kathy Wilson**, 3rd Grade, Sierra Heights Elementary School
- The Creative Arts Team at Nelsen Middle School, including **Sheri Stephens**, Unified Arts; **Joey Roberts**, Band; **Rebecca Ritchie**, Computer Education; **Esther Rich**, Family & Consumer Science Education; **Judy Oakes**, Librarian; **Ginger Montague**, Drama; **Brian Hoskins**, Choir; **Lauren Daugherty**, Orchestra; and **Tim McElroy**, Technology Education

Each individual or team of teachers, who demonstrate high standards of professionalism in education, will receive a \$500 cash award and special honors at the award ceremony on May 8. This event is free and open to the public.

Over 70 teachers from throughout the Renton area were nominated this year as individuals or as part of a team. Two separate committees, consisting of community and business leaders, reviewed applications and conducted personal interviews with the teachers to select this year's winners. The selection criteria for naming the award winners are based on national standards for teaching.

The Ahead of the Class award program is a partnership between the Renton Chamber of Commerce, Renton public and private schools, and Renton businesses. It is part of the Chamber's effort to provide individuals, businesses, and organizations the opportunity to invest in a brighter and better tomorrow for our young people. The program's aim is to enhance community awareness of the excellence of education in Renton.

The program also provides an opportunity for community partners to show their support for education and our valuable teachers. The Award ceremony on May 8 is free to the public thanks to this year's Ahead of the Class sponsors. Presenting Sponsor: **American Family Insurance**; Corporate Sponsors: **The Advanced Mortgage Group**, **Gene Heuschel - Edward Jones Investments**, **King & Bunnys Appliances**, **Marcie Maxwell - Windermere Realtor**, **McLendon Hardware**, and **Puget Sound Energy**; Reception Sponsor: **Renton School District**; Entertainment Sponsors: **Alcan Building Maintenance** and **Renton Education Association**; Video Sponsor: **Puget Sound Access/ Channel 77**; and Media Sponsor, **Cat's Eye Group**.

To RSVP or for more information, call the Chamber at 425-226-4560 or visit www.GoRenton.com.

(more)

2007 Ahead of the Class Award Winners Information

Celeste Brady, ELL Teacher, Hazen High School

Brady has been teaching for over 25 years, and 2007 marks her 15th year in Renton at Hazen High School. Her dedication to breaking language and cultural barriers is evident in the innovative teaching methods used in her classroom curriculum. During Brady's time at Hazen she has implemented a Mexican Folkloric after school dance class, influenced student participation in the City of Renton's "Families from around the World" project, and has also coordinated a lecture series called "Building Bridges" a 12-month program featuring notable guest speakers, informational presentations and community-wide events. Brady builds a classroom environment among strong principles including safety, mutual respect, high expectations, professionalism and active learning, among others. Collectively, Brady says her foreign living and working experience in Spain, Japan, Puerto Rico and Mexico are among the most valuable professional development experiences she has had. "I understand the frustration of being unable to fully participate in society due to language barriers, as well as the joy of new life-long friendships," she said.

Kerri Dowd, Family & Consumer Science, Hazen High School

Dowd has been teaching Health & Leadership courses for almost 6 years at Hazen High School. This summer she is expecting to complete Masters of School Guidance Counseling from City University. Dowd's passion for healthy lifestyles is clear in the "A Better You" project she gives implements each semester. For the project students are asked to choose a health habit they want to build or break, such as "Stop drinking soda", and they must work at their habit for 21 days, keeping a journal that is signed by a parent or guardian. Dowd says she also spends a lot of time after school taking with students one-on-one, which gives her a chance not only to help the students academically, but also to also be aware of their daily choices and coach them through the consequences that may arise. Before becoming a teacher in the Renton School District, Dowd served as Executive Director for the King County chapter of MADD. She has also worked on several different advisory committees in the Renton School District including Health, Personal Choices, Independent Living & Leadership, Freshman Smaller Learning Committee and the Care Team.

Minerva Erickson, Title 1, Campbell Hill Elementary School

Erickson has over 38 years of experience in teaching and has dedicated 23 years of this experience to Campbell Hill Elementary School in Renton. Her curriculum for 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders allows young students to create reading strategies and discover ways to make reading enjoyable and fun. Strategies implemented in Erickson's classroom include making story predictions and creating "text to word" connections, which strengthens students' writing and communication skills in addition to improving reading. "The Learning Environment is a very important part to a successful learning process," said Erickson. To keep students involved and feeling comfortable around their peers, Erickson begins every lesson with an affirming poem about positive thinking and actions. Community involvement is also important to Erickson. Throughout her years in Renton she has kept strong connections with various community groups including several within the Renton School District, Puget Sound-area educators, and especially, the Filipino-American Educators of Washington, and group she has collaborated with for many Renton School District endeavors.

Kelly Feldman, 1st & 2nd Grade, Kennydale Elementary

Feldman has been teaching for five years and will receive her Masters of Education this summer from the University of Washington. Because she teaches a variety of subjects to her class, Feldman builds upon classroom principles to create a learning experience that is meaningful and engaging for *all* students. Notably, all 21 of her students this year have passed the district's assessments for reading, called the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Learning. Feldman says one of the most effective and valuable partnerships she has developed has been with students' families and other community members. In 2006, she organized a Family Biography Project for students to work on with their parents and family members. Next year, Feldman hopes to build new community partnerships including one with the Renton Senior Center to engage local seniors and students in reading projects, and to also organize a community service project for her students with a local food bank or shelter.

Paul Scott, Technology Education, Sartori Education Center

Scott has been in education for 32 years and has been teaching in Renton for nine years. The curriculum at Sartori, where Scott currently teaches, focuses on helping students with special circumstances build habits, attitudes and job skills necessary to make the connection between school and the workforce. Scott says he runs his classroom like a job, grading on the criteria of Preparedness, Professionalism, Performance, Persistence and Punctuality. "We run a computer repair shop and have students do the repair, configuration, installation and modification of computers in the classroom," said Scott. Students in Scott's classroom also engage "real-life" out-of-classroom experiences like helping with computer networking during the Renton Rotary Caper Auction. Before coming to Renton, Scott was a Special Education teacher in the Highline School District, where he created and implemented a more efficient and user-friendly database program. The program is still used district-wide today.

Kathy Wilson, 3rd Grade, Sierra Heights Elementary

Wilson graduated with a Bachelor of Education from Central Washington State University and has been teaching for almost nine years. Her classroom is filled with young students eager to learn and develop new skills in a variety of subject matter. There is no age limit or requirement for learning in Wilson's teaching philosophy. Wilson is currently teaching her 3rd graders how to use Microsoft PowerPoint, a challenging software program that students most often learn at the High School level. "Many of my students create presentations at home and even teach their parents how to use the program," said Wilson. Wilson says her goal in teaching PowerPoint is to help her students prepare for the technical world in which they live in. Through her teaching methods, Wilson delivers a learning environment that is built upon mutual respect and trust. She builds this environment by modeling, teaching and expecting respectful and safe behavior at all times.

Sheri Stephens, Joey Roberts, Rebecca Ritchie, Esther Rich, Judy Oakes, Ginger Montague, Brian Hoskins, Lauren Daugherty and Tim McElroy, The Creative Arts Team, Nelsen Middle School

The Creative Arts Team uses resources that were designed by teachers and students alike and are synthesized to provide a unique learning experience. These resources come from several key subject areas taught including Unified Arts, Band, Orchestra, Choir, Drama, Computer Education, Family & Consumer Science Education, Library Education and Technology Education. Together, these entities provide a learning environment that fosters positive group dynamics focused on several multi-media events and performances at the school each year. Among these events is the Martin Luther King Day assembly, where each team member contributes lessons from their subject area with the purpose of giving students an understanding of the Civil Rights Movement. Since the Creative Arts Team has been working in collaboration they have helped bridge the curriculum gap and solve inconsistencies that are often found in environments where isolation and independence is bred. Discovering the surpassing power of drawing from one another's strengths and expertise to provide exceptional learning experiences for their students has been the glue that has kept this team together and going strong. Since working together, the team says they have developed a greater appreciation for subject matter taught by fellow colleagues, and have also found it to become more natural to integrate each other's subject matter into their own lesson plan.

###