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Fire Safety Poster Contest Winners

The students at Sheridan Elementary/Jr. High recently participated in a poster contest for fire safety. Winners in the photograph are pictured. Standing in the back from left to right are Rudy Anzaldua, Kayla Machart, Katelyn Tesch, Lori Peterson and Mykaela Gundelach; second row: Brynn Munoz, Hank Barker, Jamie Kutzer, Skila Goins; front row: Tia Sexton, Clayton Botard, Mikenna Gabler, Maria Esquivel, Melissa Beck. Absent from the photo is Skyler Biddle.

WCJC Instructors Honored For Excellence

Speaking with Wharton County Junior College (WCJC) instructors Jennifer Jeffery and Sharon Prince is something WCJC students feel quite comfortable doing. That's because both instructors share a passion to make a difference in students' lives. That commitment to students has been recognized as both were honored with the 2006 WCJC Award for Excellence in Teaching.

The new award, made possible through an anonymous endowed gift of \$200,000, is presented annually to at least one full-time instructor who embodies the mission of WCJC to build dreams and transform lives by making a difference inside and outside the classroom. Nominations are made by division chairs or by the vice president of workforce development, continuing education, and distance learning. The honor includes a \$5,000 unrestricted cash award for each recipient.

Prince, a 20-year educator, is department head and instructor of English at the WCJC Fort Bend Technical Center. She was inspired to teach by her own teachers who served as surrogate parents.

"My teachers were my guidance so I want to be guidance for my students," Prince said.

Figuring she didn't have a chance of winning, Prince accepted the nomination of her division head, Dr. Paul Spellman, and submitted the required forms. When she was notified of her selection, she was both surprised and excited.

"In teaching you get individuals who affirm what you've done, but otherwise there aren't a whole lot of accolades. So it was nice to get the award," Prince said.

Jeffery was speechless when she learned of her selection.

"It's a real honor to receive this award. I really love what I do and appreciate being recognized for my efforts," she said.

Jeffery, a native of Richmond and a graduate of B.F. Terry High School, joined WCJC in 1999. She teaches general biology, serves as the biology lab coordinator for all three WCJC campuses, and has been the primary faculty sponsor of the WCJC Biology Club since helping to reorganize it in spring 2002. She is also preparing to teach environmental science in spring 2007.

Both instructors consider teaching their calling and are inspired by students' success and discoveries.

For Prince, who "really believes in helping the individual student as much as possible," the stories are similar, but the students are unique. Her story could be about a student who was empowered to write more effectively as he shared his life story about recovering from an addiction. Perhaps Prince's story is about a student who was able to report improved grades after implementing some of her reading strategies. Or the story might be about how Prince helped a student obtain scholarships during a financially challenging divorce.

"We're here to give people a second chance and allow them to make something of their lives if they've made mistakes in the past," Prince said.

While an undergraduate, Prince said she decided to teach at a community college to reach students who wanted to make a better life for themselves and their families.

"Teaching at the community college is particularly rewarding because we provide access to education to students who would not have access otherwise, due to finances, family commitments or jobs," she continued.

For Jeffery, many of her career highlights are tied to her role as sponsor of the WCJC Biology Club, where there is much camaraderie.

"I strongly believe that what we do outside the classroom is just as important, if not more so, in the mentoring of our students. With the club, I am able to interact with students in an academic, yet informal environment," she said.

Particularly rewarding for Jeffery is the opportunity to expose students to biology through field trips, such as ones taken to the Welder Wildlife Foundation and the North Padre Island National Seashore.

A true scientist who enjoys discoveries and sharing those with students, Jeffery presented weekly science programs this summer at the Garwood Veteran's Memorial Library. Children from pre-school through middle school learned about marine animals, amphibians, reptiles and the human body. They also viewed some of WCJC's specimens and touched live animals shared by local residents and former WCJC Biology Club member Erin Fucik.

Another commonality shared by Jeffery and Prince is their commitment to improving the curriculum and accommodating students' needs.

Prince teaches at least two online courses each semester and is proud that the department has quadrupled its online offerings since she became department head in 2004.

"Demand was always there,

Jennifer Jeffery

Sharon Prince

but we had to build who would teach online," Prince said, noting that a total of five instructors will teach English courses online this fall.

Exemplifying her commitment to students, Prince used her award money to purchase a laptop computer so she can "do my online courses better."

In addition to online courses, Prince presents an ITV, or interactive television, course to high school students in Jackson and Matagorda Counties. Broadcast from the WCJC Fort Bend Technical Center, the courses enable students at Ganado and Tidehaven High Schools to concurrently earn high school and college credit in spite of their schools' small enrollments.

Prince admits that it takes time for instructors to master the time delay presented by ITV, but that students adapt quickly.

"I'll say something and the students will open their mike and I hear myself saying that. It's very weird," she said.

For Jeffery, her decision to hold an all-day training session for general biology lab instructors and lead the development of an instructor's lab handbook in 2004 was obvious after the curriculum had been revised to include more hands-on and experiment-based lab exercises. Having been an adjunct professor for two semesters before jumping into her full-time position, she knew the frustration of wondering where to locate supplies and how to properly set up the labs.

"After adopting a lab manual that would correspond to our facilities and our budget, we still needed an instructor's handbook to aid in the preparation and organization of the labs" said Jeffery.

"We did the training session first, using a draft of the handbook. Then the instructor's handbook was a work-in-progress the first year as I asked instructors for their input."

The instructor handbooks for general biology labs, which are customized for each campus, are given to every new general biology instructor.

Jeffery, who has always loved educational settings, has been part of them for years. After high school graduation, she at

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