

Inspiring teachers honored at SCCC

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am3/29/07teach6-Photo by Anna Murphey/New Jersey Herald-- SCCC presents the 6th Annual Inspiring Teacher Awards sponsored by Tri-Co Federal Credit Union at the Sussex Bank Theater at the college on Thursday night. Hamburg Elementary School teacher Dorothy Jean Smalley accepts her award while principal Steven Engravalle looks on, nominating student Alaina Piso was unable to attend the ceremony

By ELISA D. KELLER

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NEWTON — Pope John XXIII High School graduate Ashley Cintron never dreamed her future career would be anything other than a stable, nine-to-five desk job. But after taking Sharon Zuckerman's mass media class, everything changed.

She was exposed to classic films like "Casablanca," and immersed herself in Zuckerman's lessons on the history of cinema. Now in her sophomore year at Marymount Manhattan College, Cintron has foregone traditional careers and is studying to become a film editor.

"Mrs. Zuckerman had such an amazing passion, and she made everyone in my class share her passion as well. She allowed me to dream, and she allowed me to want more than just a nine-to-five life," Cintron wrote in an essay nominating her former teacher for the Sixth Annual Inspiring Teacher Awards.

On Thursday night, Zuckerman was among nine teachers honored by former students in the Sussex Bank Theater at Sussex County Community College in Newton. Teachers from across the county were invited to the event, not knowing who had nominated them for the award.

Some, like Roger Schreiner of Kittatinny Regional High School, easily guessed who had put them in the spotlight. "I had a suspicion it was Noelle. It's the kind of kid she is — very appreciative," smiled Schreiner.

Thomas Brennan of Newton High School, however, was pleasantly surprised to find he was nominated by Douglas Jacobus.

"Both on and off the football field (Mr. Brennan) has taught me strength and courage," Jacobus wrote in his essay. "He helped mold me into the man I am today."

"I was absolutely flattered and flabbergasted," Brennan said upon accepting his award. "I can't tell you how proud I am of Doug."

Excerpts of each winning essay were read aloud to introduce the inspiring teachers, causing some to tear up as they hugged their former students and approached the podium.

"I can't even describe what it means to me," said Hamburg Elementary teacher Dorothy Jean Smalley, remembering the past students who have come back to visit her over the years.

Jennifer Viti of Wallkill Valley Regional High School accepted her award with a heavy heart, as it came at the end of her final day as an English teacher at the school. She was recently selected as vice principal of Fort Lee High School.

Vernon High School teacher Robert Kirchmer accepted his award by thanking his students. "As teachers, we try to do our best. It's a tough job, but with kids like Jaci, it makes the job a lot easier and a lot better."

His former student, Jaci Bryan, spent a lot of time in the principal's office during her freshman and sophomore years. "I hated teachers, rules and everything else that had to do with school," Bryan wrote, crediting Kirchmer's advice and guidance with her change in attitude junior year. "Mr. Kirchmer was my best friend and probably the only reason I graduated high school."

Megan Wolff, a graduate of High Point Regional High School, decided to honor her former music teacher Theresa Riccardi for helping her overcome her shyness and pursue a career in choral direction. "She always gave us a challenge. She has so much enthusiasm and passion, she pushes you (to do the same,)" Wolff said.

Linda Nieman, executive director of planning and advancement at Sussex County Community College, believes these life-altering relationships are the crux of the Inspiring Teacher Awards.

"(Teaching's) not always easy, and sometimes it is downright challenging," she said in her closing remarks. "It's my hope that you feel inspired to continue the good work that you've already been doing."

The following teachers were given Inspiring Teacher Awards at Sussex County Community College.

Josephine Aiello; High Point Regional High School; Nominated by: Kayla Varca-dipane

Thomas Brennan; Newton High School; Nominated by: Douglas Jacobus

Robert Kirchmer; Vernon Township High School; Nominated by: Jaci Bryan

Benita Krupnick; Frankford Township School; Nominated by: Rita Elston

Theresa Riccardi; High Point Regional High School; Nominated by: Megan Wolff

Roger Schreiner; Kittatinny Regional High School; Nominated by: Noelle Woodhead

Dorothy Jean Smalley; Hamburg Elementary School; Nominated by: Alaina Piso

Jennifer Viti; Wallkill Valley Regional High School; Nominated by: Sarah Griggs

Sharon Zuckerman; Pope John XXIII High School; Nominated by: Ashley Cintron