

School board honours local teachers

By Tony Pearson

Hastings Prince Edward District School Board has as its highest honour what are called the 'Great Place' awards. These recognize those who make a significant contribution to student achievement and go the extra mile to make board schools 'a great place to learn.'

This year, that honour went to two local teachers - Valerie Loney of Maynooth Public School, and Diane Winmill of North Hastings High School.

Director of education Mandy Savery-Whiteway read the citations at a special ceremony in Belleville last week. She had this to say about Loney, who has taught and coached at Maynooth for over a decade:

'Valerie is known to be a kind and compassionate teacher who genuinely cares about student learning. She works with the Student Leadership Team and through various initiatives, showing them how cooperation, honesty and respect can make a difference in school climate. In one instance Valerie helped the team make tissue paper flowers because they wanted to support another student's ill family member. In another she helped the team organize a Sports Day for younger children. Through these experiences, students realized their potential while being in a safe and caring environment.'

The director also noted that Loney is an artist whose paintings grace the school inside and out. In addition, she stated: 'Valerie has refined the artistic talents of students and helped them discover new aspects about themselves.'

As most people know from the many performances of NHHS bands around town, Winmill is a music teacher at the high school. Her citation read in part:

Dianne displays a keen sense of responsibility towards students when teaching the curriculum. She actively finds and teaches pieces of music that match students' age and interest, as evidenced by their performances at the Bancroft Playhouse, for seniors at the Manor and Riverside Place, and to area elementary schools. Dianne has had a tremendous impact on hundreds of students at North Hastings High School. She helps them to stay on track academically and gain confidence in their ability to play music. She works extremely well with students in all pathways and tirelessly supports extracurricular music programs at the school.

The director read a nomination letter from a community partner: 'When visiting North Hastings High School, I actually stood in the hallway listening for 15 minutes without Dianne's knowledge and I heard things happen in that Music room that were quite unbelievable! The kids were engaged, inquisitive, eager and respectful.'

In turn, Winmill stated that she was both surprised and humbled by the award: 'I feel blessed to be honoured for doing a job that I love.'