



NJDOE News

For More Information Contact the Public Information Office:

Kathryn Forsyth, Director
Richard Vespucci
609-292-1126

For Release: October 6, 2004

Sussex County Educator Named 2004-05 New Jersey Teacher of the Year

Peggy Stewart sees mountains that need moving and pyramids that must be kept in balance. The veteran social studies teacher from Vernon Township is New Jersey's Teacher of the Year for 2004-05. Stewart, who was honored at today's regular monthly meeting of the State Board of Education, was cited for her individualistic approach to her students and for her persistence in creating well-rounded experiences to develop her students' sense of citizenship as well as a strong world view.

"My philosophy is anchored in the power of the pen, the art of communication, and the habits of the mind," says Stewart. "I strive to empower students to move mountains by writing and speaking. I recognize that not all of the mountains moved will be as grand in size as Kilimanjaro or Everest. But whether the student moves a bluff, butte, hill or mound is inconsequential. The significance lies in each accomplishment, no matter the scale."

"Peggy Stewart is a first-rate teacher with a 21st century outlook," said Commissioner of Education William L. Librera, who introduced her today to the State Board at its regular monthly meeting. "Her classroom is an extension of the community. She creates many opportunities for her students to participate in community activities. She also encourages her students to view past and current events in a global context."

Stewart considers teaching to be one of three structural elements of a pyramid, all of which must be kept in balance to hold up, at its apex, the "crown of achievement." The other two elements are the community, which provides support for educational needs, and local administrators, who are fiscally accountable to the community and responsible for building partnerships.

"The pyramid framework visually displays the concept that student achievement is everyone's responsibility, for if we lack any of the necessary structural bases, we cannot hold up the 'crown' of achievement," she said.

Stewart's own crowning professional achievement came in 2000, when she was selected as a senior fellow in Yale University's Programs in International Educational Resources (PIER). For two years, she participated in an academic research study, a six-week field experience in China and Mongolia, and a two-year curriculum development project. She is currently a senior fellow with PIER. Stewart has also traveled to Japan and Brazil to study their cultures.

"We begin reaching students by seeing the world through a child's eyes," says Stewart. "The rewards are seeing the child share in our vision, able to see the big picture, and empowered to be active members of the world community."

New Jersey's newest Teacher of the Year began college at the age of 30, after starting her family. She received a bachelor's degree in history with a K-12 teaching certification from William Paterson University. She later earned her master's degree in liberal studies from Ramapo College, with a concentration in multiculturalism. She is currently a candidate for national teaching certification.

She has taught history exclusively at Vernon Township High School since 1991, and has participated or led special projects for her students, including an annual Model United Nations for ninth grade students. In addition, she has developed two projects that she is especially proud of: The Senior Citizen Technology Program has students teach computer skills to senior citizens; and the Political Think Tank, a student-run organization that promotes political discussion and awareness within the community.

"I have listened to many professors lecture about the ideal teacher whom all educators should strive to be," said, Michael Romano, a former student of Stewart's who is currently majoring in secondary education. "It did not take long to realize that each professor was describing a teacher much like Ms. Stewart."

Dennis J. Mudrick, principal of Vernon Township High School, says, "Ms. Stewart has been and remains a fundamental reason for the overall success of the instructional program in the area of social studies at Vernon

Township High School. She is strong, creative and effective in dealing with students and parents alike. She is well organized, thoroughly prepared for the lessons she teaches and outstanding in teaching students with different learning abilities. She has always represented herself, her school community and her profession with dignity, integrity and class."

New Jersey's Teacher of the Year is selected annually in a process that begins at the grassroots level. During the school year, school-level and district-level teachers of the year are selected. Each spring, county level teachers of the year are chosen and their detailed applications are sent to Trenton, where they are reviewed by a panel of educators representing a cross-section of the state's education community.

As part of the award, Stewart was granted a half-year sabbatical sponsored by the Educational Testing Service. The Department of Education will cover all travel costs. The department will also reimburse the Vernon Township Public Schools for the cost of hiring substitute teachers through December. At the request of the New Jersey Education Association, Saturn Retailers of New Jersey have unanimously agreed to provide a Saturn for Stewart's use

NOTE TO EDITORS AND REPORTERS: [Attached is a list of the 2004-05 County Teachers of the Year.](#)