



NJDOE News

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For Release : October 18, 2005

Reporters & Photographers: To arrange for interviews with Robert Goodman at Bergen County Technical High School, call Andrea Sheridan, principal at 201-343-6000 ext. 7700

Bergen County Educator Named State Teacher of the Year

Education is not something extra that is added onto a civilization, it is at the core of civilization.

**--Robert Goodman, Physics Teacher,
Bergen County Technical High School**

Physics has influenced Robert Goodman's life in a way he says enables him to see the world differently, and with clarity. And, although he did not originally aspire to be a teacher, his passion for physics and lifelong learning has taken him from boardrooms in the corporate world to the classroom, where he has dedicated his career to popularizing the subject he loves so well.

His ability to teach and inspire students from a wide variety of backgrounds and abilities has not gone unnoticed by his students, his colleagues and by the highest levels of education in New Jersey. Acting Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy has announced that Goodman, a Ridgewood resident and teacher at Bergen County Technical High School in Teterboro, is New Jersey's Teacher of the Year for 2005-06.

"It is not our role to determine what people should do with their lives," says Goodman. "We do not have a monopoly on determining what things are worth doing and what things are not. However, it is our responsibility as educators to do all that we can to illuminate the options and empower individuals to follow their own course."

"Robert Goodman is an innovative, tireless teacher who is committed to his field and to the students put in his charge," said Acting Commissioner Davy. "Like all of our best teachers, he has never stopped learning himself and is in fact now completing his coursework towards a doctorate degree in science education from Rutgers University.

"He is credited with making physics class a 'cool' place in which students like to hang out," Davy continued. "He is always seeking new ways to teach his honors and advanced courses in physics to students, and he is always seeking ways to attract students of different abilities."

Davy said she is especially excited that Goodman represents the field of science. She noted that many of the key reforms in education today at the state and federal level are focusing on reforming high schools to fit the 21st century and to bolster teaching and learning of mathematics and science at all levels.

Goodman organizes his classes around a "social constructivism" approach, in which students of mixed abilities collaborate as a group to solve problems. "You can't learn a new way of thinking by hearing about it; you have to do it," he says. "I can model some approaches, but then my students have to take what they can from that to develop their own thinking processes."

After graduating from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1975 with a bachelor's degree in physics, Goodman embarked on a career in technology, entering the high fidelity business. For the next 15 years, he designed equipment and ran several companies, including Harman Kardon, JBL Consumer Products and Onkyo International Operations.

And then, in the course of working on a particular project, he re-opened a physics textbook he had in college. "I realized I had forgotten the joy of doing basic physics problems," he said. "I began to see that there was an option that I had never considered - teaching physics at a high school level. That would allow me to teach

students the physics that I loved as well as the way of thinking about the world that is intrinsic to physics."

Goodman enrolled in the State University of New York at Stony Brook where he earned his masters in teaching (physics). He joined Bergen County Technical Schools in 1999, where he has taught physics honors, advanced placement physics, modern physics and computer aided design. In the 2002-03 school year, he served as director of curriculum for the Englewood Public Schools and oversaw a complete revamping of the district's course offerings.

Goodman says he is proud of his school's commitment to accept students of different abilities into advanced classes formerly thought of as more suited for elite students only. "Seeing our students raise themselves well above the level that would have been considered possible for them is the ultimate reward," he says. "There is pleasure in taking elite students and refining their skills. But that seems hollow compared to taking students with a range of abilities and helping them achieve those same heights."

"Robert's sense of humor, positive attitude, high expectations, fairness, flexibility, and compassion for the human ingredient not only guides his work, but provides a compelling model for colleagues and students alike," says Andrea Sheridan, principal of Bergen County Technical High School. "Robert is self-motivated and his work manifests a sense of inquiry that consistently provokes his students to delve more deeply into critical thinking and problem solving."

Yuri Zavorotniy, who also teaches physics at Bergen County Tech, calls Goodman "a motivated, incredibly hard-working, modern and creative instructor with the highest pedagogical, scientific and professional qualifications."

And from Joanne and Dave Zornow of River Vale came this praise: "He has changed the lives of both our sons by nurturing curiosity, encouraging abstract thinking and helping them discover unrealized potential. With his drive, intelligence and leadership skills, Mr. Goodman could be very influential in the corporate boardroom. Instead, he has chosen to make his impact in a classroom, a choice for which our family is very grateful."

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, Goodman 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 Bergen County Technical High School for the cost of hiring substitute teachers for Goodman through December.

NOTE TO EDITORS AND REPORTERS: Attached is a list of the [2005-06 County Teachers of the Year](#).