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Superintendent Ybarra honors Post Falls educator as 2023 Teacher of the Year

POST FALLS – Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra visited Treaty Rock Elementary this morning to surprise fourth-grade teacher Karen Lauritzen with a \$1,000 check, balloons and the prestigious title of Idaho’s 2023 Teacher of the Year.

Selected by a blue ribbon panel from among 13 finalists, Lauritzen will serve as a spokesperson and representative for Idaho educators. She also will be the state’s nominee for National Teacher of the Year.

“Putting Idaho’s incredible teaching talent on display is always a privilege, and I’m so excited to again announce an incredibly deserving Idaho Teacher of the Year,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said. “This year, we received 348 nominations that resulted in 58 teacher applications. As always, learning about our teachers’ deep dedication to students, community and the craft of teaching was absolutely inspiring. If these instructors are any indication, the future is bright for Idaho students.”

“This year’s winner, Karen Lauritzen, is an amazing example of an educator who has made going the extra mile for her students a part of everyday practice,” said Superintendent Ybarra. “Karen’s talents go beyond a mastery of teaching. She has created tremendous connections with her students and the wider school community, and she excels in the art of building classroom relationships that involve not only her students, but also their educational network, from parents to peers.”

“Karen has found creative and effective ways to help students continue classroom conversations at home while connecting with their families on a daily basis,” the superintendent said. “At the end of each school day, she gives students a chance to talk about the great things that happened that day. She then writes them on the board and emails a photo to parents, encouraging conversations at home about each and every school day.”

Lauritzen has taught at Treaty Rock since 2012 and has served on the school’s behavioral leadership teams, providing focused professional development to both the school and district staff. She was chosen as the Treaty Rock Elementary School Teacher of the Year in 2021.

“Her ability to bring real topics to life in the classroom is unparalleled and her dedication to creating opportunities for her students to learn goes beyond the classroom walls,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “When it came time to teach her speech-writing unit, she connected with Gov. Brad Little, who was able to visit for a bill-signing event and to give a speech. Karen also gave her own speech on partnering with the Idaho Legislature to promote the best education outcomes for her students.”

“I was thrilled to see that she chose this topic. Karen has identified an amazing opportunity to bring instructors, educational communities and lawmakers together to find ways to prioritize improving public education for everyone. That we have instructors thinking this way and acting on it is definitely something to be excited about,” the superintendent said.

In her 20 years as a teacher, Lauritzen has served students and communities in Arizona and Alaska as well as in the Post Falls School District. She is a founding member of Citizens for Post Falls Schools and has successfully advocated for essential school levies through grassroots efforts. She also is vice president of the Post Falls Education Association.

Lauritzen is a 2002 graduate of the University of Fairbanks in Alaska and went on to earn her Master of Arts in Special Education from Indiana’s Ball State University in 2018. She is currently working on the final phases of her Ph.D in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Idaho.

“Mrs. Lauritzen excels in building relationships with her students, among her students and with the families of her students,” said Mary Ann Pattis, third-grade teacher at Treaty Rock Elementary. “She holds daily class meetings, asking questions that help her to better understand her students’ interests and home life. These meetings help build a sense of belonging, setting her students up to appreciate and respect each other.”

Treaty Rock principal Katrina Kramer said Lauritzen combines excellent classroom leadership with dedicated public advocacy.

“Mrs. Lauritzen does a tremendous job of connecting with her students on a personal level and creating a positive classroom community where students are honored for their contributions and work hard to improve themselves,” Kramer said. “On top of planning amazing lessons, Mrs. Lauritzen takes on leadership roles throughout the district and at the state level. She is gifted in making connections with people from all walks of life, in a variety of settings.”

Whether supporting students and colleagues or bringing her voice to the public conversation, Lauritzen’s dedication to the art of teaching has been an invaluable part of the Treaty Rock Elementary School community, colleagues say.

As Teacher of the Year, Lauritzen has goals that go beyond curriculum and classroom.

“I hope that as Idaho Teacher of the Year, I will be able to be an ambassador between teachers, parents and our communities,” Lauritzen said in her application. “Our communities, state and nation would benefit from relationship building that starts in our humble public school classrooms. I would be honored to lead the way!”

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Attached: Photo of 2023 Idaho Teacher of the Year Karen Lauritzen