

GPS educators earn 'Shining Stars' nominations

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Three educators have been nominated for this year's Shining Star Award, with the winner to be announced at the annual Grove Education Foundation for Excellence (GEFFE) Gala on Saturday, April 7 at the Grove Civic Center.

The Shining Star winner will receive a \$500 cash award and a trophy designed by Society Awards. The nominees will also receive a trophy and a \$100 cash award.

In the fall, members of the GEFFE board reviews and funds grant applications submitted by Grove school teachers, librarians and principals.

From the grants awarded, the board selects the top three grant recipients whose creativity promotes GEFFE's primary goal of excellence in education. This year's nominees were selected from all the funded grants.

Julie Bloss

Julie Bloss, principal at Grove's Early Childhood Center (ECC), was nominated for her grant "PlaykerSpace."

The grant of \$3,739.87 will allow Bloss to stock a classroom with hands-on materials and curriculum to instruct the over 375 ECC students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

"Because our students learn best by being actively involved, the classroom will be referred to as our 'PlaykerSpace.'" Bloss stated in her grant. "Although our 375 students are small, they are BIG learners.

"It is our school's belief that it is never too early to promote problem solving skills, working cooperatively and the promotion of imagination."

Bloss is a third-time nominee for the Shining Star, having previously been nominated in 2011 and 2012. She is a Grove High School alum and received a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's in early childhood education.

She is a certified elementary school principal and school counselor. She has been employed by her alma mater for more than 15 years.

She is currently serves as the President of the Oklahoma Association of Elementary School

Principals Association and as an editorial advisor for the national publication “Principal Magazine.”

The Bloss family are true Ridgerunners. Her husband, Tracy, serves as a school resource office and her son, Tyler, is in Middle School and is serving this year as “Ridgy.”

LuAnn DuBois

The second nominee is LuAnn DuBois, the STEAM Lab teacher at Grove’s Upper Elementary. She received \$2,201.87 for her grant “STEAMing it Up.”

DuBois explained that her grant was needed as the STEAM lab is new at the Upper Elementary with a limited yearly budget and many of the projects costs more than the budget.

She will be able to purchase art materials that will allow students to incorporate math into creative projects.

Other components purchased with the grant money will allow students to investigate flight, with students constructing straw rockets, parachutes and hot air balloons and learning about flight capabilities, aerodynamics, gravity, rate of descent and design principals.

“Many people are familiar with the acronym STEM, but when you say STEAM, it leads to a little confusion,” DuBois noted. “The “A” adds art to science, technology, engineering and math.”

DuBois, who was a 2002 Shining Star nominee, is a 1984 graduate of Grove High School and received her bachelor’s degree in elementary education at Oklahoma State University. In 2015, she received a master’s degree in educational technology. She has been an educator at Grove Public Schools for 29 years and began teaching the STEAM lab in 2016.

DuBois has been married to her husband, Bruce, for 25 years and they have one daughter, Tessa, who will graduate from Grove High School in May.

Dr. Jo Martin

The third nominee is Dr. Jo Martin, ECC and Lower Elementary Librarian. She was nominated for her grant “Little Kids + Cool Books = Big Cool Readers,” for which she received \$588.82.

Martin submitted the grant to allow the ECC Library to sponsor a new Oklahoma reading challenge program entitled Oklahoma Redbud Read-Aloud Children’s Book Award, which is primarily for Kindergarten through Second grade.

Students in those grades will focus on reading and listening to Oklahoma Redbud Award nominated books in their classrooms.

“An ice cream poster chart will be made indicating the progress of each class towards reading/listening to the Redbud books,” Martin said. “When all 15 of the Redbud books have been read to a class, the students will receive an ice cream treat, plus a coupon for a free cone

from a local business, and a Reading Certificate.”

Martin said the goals of the new program are to build listening and analytical skills using quality, fun books and experience concept of choice and voting procedures as the classrooms will be able to vote for the favorite Read-Aloud book in March.

Martin received a bachelor’s degree business education and a master’s degree in educational administration. She later received a doctorate degree, also in educational administration.

She is certified as a superintendent, secondary and elementary principal, and as a library media specialist. She has been employed as an educator for 47 years.

She and her husband, John, have been married for 46 years and have two grandchildren.

For the 10 year in a row, the Shining Star and nominees will receive one-of-a-kind crystal awards donated by Society Awards. The company founder of Society Awards and the CEO is David Moritz, Grove High School graduate.

The theme of this year’s GEFPE Gala is “Once Upon a Time.” Since its inception in 1997, GEFPE has donated to Grove schools more than \$1,000,000 through its funding of grants and special projects.

Tickets for this year’s banquet are available at local banks or by calling Nate Pitts at 479-925-0695. Tickets are \$75 each or \$875 for a table.