



SPECIAL EDITION



Issue 2, 2015

SSD Teacher of the Year Helps Students Achieve Full Potential

Sneh Kothari said she was shocked when she was recently named Special School District's 2015 Teacher of the Year.

"I wake up each morning happy to go to work and that is only possible because SSD is so fabulous," she said.

Kothari takes great pride and feels immense satisfaction when her Vocational Skills Program (VSP) students get a job and reach other milestones. She knows she has prepared them to be successful contributors in the community.

Kothari, who works at SSD's VSP site at the Saint Louis Zoo, earned the Teacher of the Year honor for her dedication to students with disabilities and innovative efforts to help them achieve their full potential.

VSP sites allow students to gain valuable work experience to prepare for employment and independent living. The VSP site at the Saint Louis Zoo allows students to be placed in appropriate volunteer work experiences such as food service, guest services, ground maintenance, gift shop or distribution.

"The Vocational Skills Program gives me the opportunity to go beyond traditional curriculum and allow students to invest their time in learning and implementing strategies to become productive citizens of society," said Kothari. "They achieve these goals by being able to handle aspects like life skills, training, social skills and vocational skills which include good work ethics, morals, and above all, integrity."

SSD paraprofessional Deborah Reed nominated Kothari for the award along with Matt Bailey, principal at Valley Park High School in the Valley Park School District. Reed works with Kothari at the Saint Louis Zoo.

Bailey says Kothari's genuine concern for her students makes her stand out.

"Sneh feels like she can work with any student and help them learn and grow into independent adults," Bailey said. "She never doubts the fact that each student can learn to be independent."

Kothari has been a teacher with SSD since 2003. She began teaching a class of students diagnosed with autism before moving to SSD's Southview School and working in the



Sneh Kothari

Community-Based Vocational Instruction Program. Five years ago, Kothari began working at the VSP site at the zoo.

Reed said the VSP students are people with extraordinary potential. "Sneh is able to help them see this potential, through a very nurturing and caring nature that includes a complete team effort," she said.

Kothari was selected as one of SSD's eight Key to the Classroom Award winners. The Key to the Classroom Award honors SSD's top teachers for their creative approaches to student learning, innovative programming and commitment to student success.

Kothari will represent SSD next year in the statewide competition for Missouri Teacher of the Year, a program sponsored by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ■

Turn the page to see a complete list of this year's staff award honorees and Special Ambassador award winners. ▶



Go to <http://bit.ly/1wY7B0e> to watch a short video and hear more about Kothari's impact on students.

SSD SALUTES STAFF, COMMUNITY FOR EXCELLENCE



SSD HAS A WIDE RANGE OF AWARD PROGRAMS TO RECOGNIZE INDIVIDUALS WHO CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUCCESS OF SSD STUDENTS. THIS YEAR'S WINNERS ARE:

Special Ambassador Award Winners

The Special Ambassador Award is the highest recognition given by SSD. The award is presented to community members who demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to the students and/or staff of SSD.

Groups

- **Hazelwood West High School Principals**
- **Lafayette Industries**
- **Sparklers of Parkway Central High School**
- **SSM St. Clare Health Center**
- **Saint Louis Zoo**

Individuals

- **Daisy Brown**, Laundry Room Supervisor, Parc Provence
- **Sheilah Fitzgerald**, Principal, Jana Elementary School, Hazelwood School District
- **Virginia Harris**, Educational Surrogate
- **Herman Lugge**, Recreation Therapy Supervisor, Veterans Affairs Medical Center
- **Jane McKinney**, Principal, McCurdy Elementary School, Hazelwood School District
- **Joylynn Pruitt**, Superintendent, University City School District
- **Ryan Sherp**, Assistant Principal, Lindbergh High School, Lindbergh School District

Key to the Classroom Award Winners

The Key to the Classroom Award honors the top teachers at SSD. The SSD teacher and location to which he or she is assigned are:

- **Julie Fletcher**, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, SSD
- **Angelina Godinez-Bennett**, Litzinger School, SSD
- **David Hope**, South Technical High School, SSD
- **Sneh Kothari**, Saint Louis Zoo, Vocational Skills Program, SSD
- **Stacey Kozlowski**, Jennings Senior High School, Jennings School District
- **Susan Moser**, Neuwoehner High School, SSD
- **Jodi Schutzenhofer**, Hazelwood West High School, Hazelwood School District
- **Sarah Sparwasser**, Pershing Elementary School, University City School District

Building Block Award Winners

The Building Block Award honors SSD's outstanding paraprofessionals for their contributions to the lives of SSD students. The SSD paraprofessional and the location to which he or she is assigned are:

- **Mary Fritts**, Ross Elementary School, Parkway School District
- **Demarco Hudson**, Neuwoehner High School, SSD
- **Pauline Ingram**, Parkway Central High School, Parkway School District
- **Brenton M. Jamison**, Meramec Elementary School, Clayton School District
- **Nancy Nations**, Sperreng Middle School, Lindbergh School District
- **Linda Nelson**, Rockwood Summit High School, Rockwood School District
- **Kathleen Schwarte**, Pattonville High School, Pattonville School District
- **Susan Stuart**, Bayless Elementary School, Bayless School District
- **Wayne Woodrum**, Tillman Elementary School, Kirkwood School District
- **Deborah Young**, Ackerman School, SSD

Lasting Impression Award Winners

SSD honors other dedicated individuals within the District through the Lasting Impression Award. Created in 2006, it is awarded to SSD support staff who make a difference in the lives of students both within and outside the classroom.

- **Amy Blumenfeld**, SSD Area Coordinator, Lafayette High School/ Marquette High School, Rockwood School District
- **Mollie Bolton**, SSD Area Coordinator, Curriculum & Instruction
- **Rebecca Braddock**, Occupational Therapist, Parkway School District/ Ladue School District
- **Traci Broeker**, Speech-Language Pathologist, Jennings Early Childhood, Jennings School District
- **Andrea Campbell-Williams**, Speech-Language Pathologist, Normandy Middle School, Normandy School District
- **Sonja Conley**, Social Worker, Northview High School, SSD
- **Natalie Corzine**, ABA Supervisor, Meramec Elementary School, Clayton School District
- **Kristen Driskill**, Physical Therapist, Mehlville School District
- **Trent Estes**, Bus Driver, SSD
- **Kellian Hanks**, Financial Secretary, North Technical High School, SSD
- **Steven E. Long**, Warehouse Supervisor, SSD
- **Rashell Mehring**, Computer Access Facilitator, SSD
- **Joann Noll**, Administrator, Parent Education and Diversity Awareness Program, SSD
- **Jeff Schneider**, Effective Practice Specialist, Transition, SSD
- **Virginia Schroeder**, Nurse, LaSalle Springs Middle School, Rockwood School District

SEF Campership Helps Student Transition to Middle School

More than halfway through her first year at Rogers Middle School in the Affton School District, Stasia Noblett is putting to good use the skills she learned last year during a stay at a summer camp.

At Camp Cougar, Stasia enjoyed typical camp activities, such as swimming, field trips and team-building exercises. But she also had the opportunity to develop other skills that will last a lifetime.

“I gained new social skills, including learning how to approach someone to make a new friend, and how to have good conversations and not be so shy,” said Stasia, who receives services from SSD.

Stasia was able to attend Camp Cougar with the help of a scholarship called a “campership” awarded through the Special Education Foundation (SEF). The SEF is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to help children with disabilities in St. Louis County achieve success in areas not supported by tax dollars.

The time that Stasia spent at Camp Cougar provided her with an excellent opportunity to interact with peers, said Julie Jacob, SSD teacher at Gotsch Intermediate School in the Affton School District.

“The program consists of social games and activities and helps her learn to take turns, deal with winning and losing games, and handling frustration,” said Jacob. “During camp she has appropriate role models for grade-level social skills.”

Jacob added that the opportunity to attend a camp allows students like Stasia to become more confident, learn to work and share with peers, and get ready for middle school.

Stasia received the Sammy Goldman “Living Big” Campership through the SEF. It is an award given in tribute to Sammy Goldman, a young child whose life ended at the age of 5. His parents, Rebecca and Louis Goldman, established the campership to honor their son’s memory.

“It was an absolute pleasure to meet the Goldmans,” said Melanie Noblett, Stasia’s mother. “We are honored that they chose our daughter for the campership. They described Sammy as being very similar to Stasia in interests, personalities and especially their love for music.”

Noblett attributes much of Stasia’s success to speech and music therapy provided through SSD. “Music is her world and a way for her to communicate to others. She has thrived with the support of her resource teachers, and has gained learning strategies to calm down and interact socially.”

She added that without the help of SSD services, Stasia would not be where she is today. “Stasia has been very fortunate to have the opportunity to be supported by fantastic teachers who are patient, knowledgeable and compassionate. With their supports, Stasia is a strong, determined and successful student, and she has come a long way.”

The SEF provides support and assistance to students who receive services from SSD, including scholarships, camperships, hearing aids, assistive equipment, and much more. To learn more about the SEF and the opportunities it offers, visit <http://sef-stl.org> ■



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—STASIA NOBLETT

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MISSION: In collaboration with partner districts, we provide technical education and a wide variety of individualized educational and support services designed for each student's successful contribution to our community.

VISION: Partners for every student's success

VALUES: student success • collaboration • integrity • stewardship • continuous improvement • equity

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NEWS FROM SSD



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Event Offers Families One-Stop Access to Disability Resources

SSD's Parent Education and Diversity Awareness Program will sponsor the North County Disability Resource Fair on April 22.

The event is scheduled for 4-7 p.m. at SSD's Ackerman School, 1550 Derhake Road in Florissant. It will feature information about programs and resources from SSD and other community agencies.

Attendees will have the chance to learn more about topics such as respite care, recreation opportunities, health care and other community resources.

Participants will include SSD's Parent Education and Diversity Awareness Program, the Recreation Council of Greater St. Louis, St. Louis Regional Office and a wide array of nonprofit providers.

The event is free and open to the public. Registration is not required to attend. For more information, call 314.989.8194 (711 Deaf/HOH). ■

