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RELEASE IMMEDIATELY

**Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association Foundation Awards Grants
For Innovation to Ten Wisconsin Elementary Schools**

Ten Wisconsin elementary school innovative programs have been recognized by the Wisconsin Retired Educators' Association (WREA) Foundation, as part of the organization's annual "Challenge Award Program."

Five First Place Winner schools each received a \$2,000 check to support their projects. Five Second Place Winner schools each received \$250.00 to support their projects. The awards are given annually and are rotated each year from elementary schools, to middle schools, to high schools. The program is designed to recognize and encourage innovation at all levels of public schools.

This year's First Place recipients were recognized for the following projects:

- Park Falls & Glidden Elementary Schools (Park Falls) and Elementary School Teacher Jessica Blue, for the "Makerspace Mania" project. The project was created in June 2017 for all pre-kindergarten through 5th grade students. The program allows students to explore a wide range of hand-on activities, experiment, create, team build, and problem-solve in a variety of ways not often found in a traditional classroom. One of the by-products of the failure without defeat philosophy has been the tendency of students to come forward to offer support and suggestions to others who are struggling or who have experienced failure.
- Algoma School District (Algoma) and Special Education Teacher Mary Donaldson, for the "Wolf Pack" project. One aspect of Healthy Children and Healthy Community is the after school Wolf Pack program (they are the Algoma Wolves). The Wolf Pack was created to improve academics but went beyond this need to serving the whole child. The funds would be used to create Literacy Pack activities that would include a book, a game and all items required to play the game. This would encourage families to eat and learn together.

- Oaklawn Elementary School (Menomonie) and 5th Grade Teacher Matthew Wigdahl, for the “Elementary/College Engineering Partnership” project. 5th grade students at Oaklawn Elementary use Engineering and Design Thinking to solve problems in the classroom and school community. They have formed a partnership to bring elementary students together with college students to work on projects. They hope to grow the collaboration between the college (UW-Stout) and the 5th graders. The 5th graders were also invited to present their designs at the spring engineering fair on campus.
- The School for Agriculture and Environmental Studies (Fox Lake) and Teacher Becky Panzer, for “Worms Ate My Garbage: Vermicomposting to Improve the Environment” project. This is an innovative process which reduces the amount of food waste entering landfills. Explorations with vermicomposting expanded student knowledge in mathematics by weighing and recording the amount of waste being put into the vermicomposting bin, observing and counting how long it took for the food waste to disappear, and studying the worms through comparing and contrasting approaches. Educating the community about vermicomposting has also begun. Our goal is to create a healthier Earth in which to learn and grow.
- Sandhill Elementary School (Stoughton) and Kindergarten Teacher Lindsay Ott, for the “Discovery Stations” project. As a team, they have set their mission to incorporate play into the classroom while maintaining the academic rigor. They have done that through Discovery Stations. Students have the opportunity to visit the STEM stations twice a week and the literacy and art stations twice a week. All of the stations are tied to the learning targets and monthly themes. The stations use play to develop fine motor skills, strengthen literacy skills, and enable student creativity. The skills such as problem solving, team work, listening, etc., that the students are learning through Discovery Stations will benefit them throughout their entire lives and are therefore essential to their success.

This year’s Second Place recipients were recognized for the following projects:

- Lakeview Elementary School (Neenah) and Literacy Coach Mary Thompson, for the “1st/5th Grade Mentoring Program” project. The program was started to address the needs of students who were performing at the beginning of year benchmark in reading at the first-grade level. To boost the reading skills of students, the mentoring program was started. The program pairs identified first-grade students with a fifth-grade mentor. Surveys given to fifth grade students to gauge their involvement in the program show that 100% of the students feel they are making an impact and enjoy working with the first-grade students.
- Oostburg Elementary School (Oostburg) and Elementary School STEM Teacher Curtis Bretall, for the “Snow Pants Locker Hanger” project. What do you do with wet snow pants at an elementary school? After much creative design and testing, the 3rd and 4th

grade classes came up with a hanger solution that is easy to use, dries the snow pants and helps to keep the halls looking neat. The ultimate goal is to produce a snow pant hanger for all of the 2-5 grade students who have lockers in the school. The students learned how to design and print the prototype hangers on a 3-D printer. This process will be used to inspire future students to look around the school for ways that they can use their skills and imaginations to solve problems and improve the world around them.

- Whitehall Memorial Elementary School (Whitehall) and Elementary School Counselor Lisa Moore for the “Multicultural Day” project. The Whitehall School District is a small rural school district that is proudly becoming more culturally diverse. The mission of the district is to provide learning experiences that empower students to create a positive vision of their future through the interaction of school, family, and the community. Multicultural Day was so well received that they plan to make it an annual event and expand the cultural immersion experience with a field trip.
- Forest Ridge Elementary School (Oak Creek) and 3rd Grade Teacher Lauren Feuling, for the “Student Media Club” project. This is a club that explores the various forms of media in the world and how we can use them to communicate information with others. The main focus of the club is to write and produce a news broadcast video for the entire school to view. The videos help to build the community of the school with not only the students, but with their families as well. As the club continues to grow, they would like to increase the quality of the videos and the ability to share them in order to better develop that sense of community in the school.
- Rio Elementary School (Rio) and Kindergarten Teacher Sarah Noguee, for the “Project Wild Child” project. Project Wild Child is a joint Early Learning and Kindergarten venture to provide the students with the opportunity to interact and connect with nature on a regular basis; to grant them permission to learn through play; to help them establish their place in the natural world; to indulge natural curiosity and turn it into a love for learning; and to nurture 21st century skills outside the classroom walls. Project Wild Child endeavors to protect the students right to play and allow them to learn math, science, literacy, and social skills through play experiences in the forest.

WREA Foundation Executive Director, Diane Wilcenski, personally contacted each of the Challenge Award winners and spoke highly of all the applicants who competed for the ten honors. “Every one of them was surprised and excited and said how much they appreciated the award! It sure gives us a good feeling to know how much our small grants are appreciated,” she said.

WREA, which organized in 1951, is a statewide association of more than 10,000 members and 60 local units. It is recognized for protecting the public pension fund, promoting public education, and providing member benefits. With a central office in Middleton, WREA maintains a strong lobbying presence to represent the views of the retired educational community.

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