

## **Kristen Merrell named R-7 Teacher of the Year** *Excellence In Teaching winners honored at May 4 event*

Kristen Merrell, a third-grade teacher at Lee's Summit Elementary, was named Lee's Summit R-7 School District 2011-12 Teacher of the Year during a surprise announcement at a May 4 reception. The reception also recognized 12 R-7 teachers who were named Lee's Summit Chamber of Commerce Excellence In Teaching Award winners earlier this spring. Excellence In Teaching winners are Jeremy Bonnesen, Pleasant Lea Middle School; Nancy Collings, Bernard Campbell Middle School; Angela Danley, Prairie View Elementary; Andria Duello, Prairie View Elementary; Julie Lee, Highland Park Elementary; Rebeckah Mayer, Pleasant Lea Middle School; Kristen Merrell, Lee's Summit Elementary; Tom Merrell, Pleasant Lea Middle School; Susie Needles, Lee's Summit High School; Becky Richardson, Longview Farm Elementary; Jackie Robertson, Highland Park Elementary; and Chuck Stephenson, Lee's Summit North High School.

The Teacher of the Year is selected from R-7 educators who are either current or past winners of the Excellence In Teaching Award. In addition to the 2011 Excellence In Teaching winners, other finalists for Teacher of the Year included three former Excellence In Teaching winners, also known as Teachers of Distinction, who were nominated for the award again this year. These former winners interviewing along with this year's award recipients for Teacher of the Year were also recognized May 4. They are Brian Campbell, Summit Lakes Middle School; Sandy McGraw, Highland Park Elementary; and Dawn Wessling, Greenwood Elementary.

The Excellence In Teaching program and reception are sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and the R-7 School District, and all students, parents, R-7 employees and community members are invited to nominate outstanding teachers. Speakers at the event included Lynn Hinkle of the Lee's Summit Chamber of Commerce and Dr. David McGehee, R-7 superintendent. More than 200 people attended the community reception.

All 2011 Excellence In Teaching winners were also honored with the Hertzog Leadership Award, established through the Lee's Summit Economic Development Council to honor Dr. Robert ("Bud") Hertzog, businessman and community leader. Dr. Hertzog, along with Lee's Summit Mayor Randy Rhoads and Phyllis Balagna of the Lee's Summit Chamber of Commerce, helped present the awards during the ceremony. The Teacher of the Year also receives a \$100 Cathy Paulson Heart to Heart Award. This award is

funded by the Loren Paulson family in honor of Cathy Paulson, who passed away in 2010.

As Teacher of the Year, Mrs. Merrell will go on to participate in the Missouri Teacher of the Year program.

Mrs. Merrell has taught at Lee's Summit Elementary since 2004, including kindergarten, third, fourth and fifth grades. She previously taught sixth grade at Prairie View Elementary and at Pleasant Lea Elementary and has been with the R-7 School District for 12 years. In addition, she has taught at Longview Community College in the College for Kids and Adults with Disabilities programs.

Before joining the R-7 School District, Mrs. Merrell worked as a dance instructor and assistant director at Steppin' Out-The Studio and operated her own preschool. She earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, her master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Webster University and will begin her specialist degree in school administration in June 2011 through the University of Central Missouri.

Within the R-7 School District, Mrs. Merrell has served on her school's Leadership Team, Literacy Team, Math Team, Student Assistance Team and Technology Team. In addition, she has served on the district's Math Team, MAP Team and as a Literacy Lead Teacher and Professional Learning Communities Coach. She has been a presenter at various school professional development workshops and regional workshops in the area of SMART goals, data collection, literacy, math and differentiated instruction.

In the community, Mrs. Merrell is a member of the Missouri State Teachers Association, the International Reading Association, ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), the Lee's Summit High School Booster Club and volunteers for the Lee's Summit United Methodist Church's summer lunch program.

Mrs. Merrell has received 13 Lee's Summit Educational Foundation PEAK grants over the last seven years, was named Math and Logic Teacher of the Year, was a 2007 state finalist for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching and has received Missouri Title V Grants in 2004 and 2005.

"Mrs. Merrell sees each of her students and meets them where they are," wrote a parent volunteer in a nomination form, "encouraging them with individualized tasks and opportunities that allow them to reach their personal best. She is deftly efficient and here classroom hums with sounds of excited and engaged children."

The recognized teachers were selected by a committee composed of R-7 staff and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and the community.