

Sault High teacher receives Service Learning Educator of the Year award

Phil Wenzel

Thursday, May 21, 2015

(Photo by Phil Wenzel / The Evening News)



The unique efforts of a Sault Area High School teacher have landed her a statewide award, the first of its kind.

Tracy Menard — who teaches theatre, psychology, a yearbook class and a class on service learning — has been honored as the 2015 Service Learning Educator of the Year. The award is given by The League Michigan, which is part of the Michigan Nonprofit Association.

According to the organization, the brand new honor is presented to “an educator who has demonstrated excellence and commitment in equipping young people with the knowledge, resources and passion to lead and serve.”

Menard, 40, has been teaching at Sault High for 16 years. She describes service learning as a way to teach students through volunteering and becoming active in their community.

She added that, through service learning, students can come to understand not just what they are being taught but also why.

“They understand that, yeah, they’re helping somebody, but they don’t understand the really big picture about how these agencies help to make our community a better place and how they work and operate,” Menard said. “And when you can bridge that gap for them it answers the question of why we do what we do and ‘why do we have to learn this?’ from a classroom perspective.”

Menard was turned on to service learning when she attended a seminar on it, presented by The League Michigan, in Sault Ste. Marie several years ago.

Now, she instructs at similar sessions around the state each summer, helping other teachers learn the best way to incorporate service learning into their lessons.

“Service learning isn’t something in addition to what they’re already doing, it’s a different way of teaching what they’re already teaching,” she said.

As an example, Menard said her class recently held a canned food drive. She used it as an opportunity to teach the students where the food goes and how it helps people. She was also able to easily spin the drive into math lessons.

“You can turn it into so many different types of lessons if you just take that little extra time and make the link,” she said.

The service learning class is only in its second year, and was created at the request of students. Members are introduced to various community agencies, then decide what projects they want to undertake based on need.

The class has reportedly become popular enough that a second section may be added next year.

Menard said she was nominated for her award by The League Michigan Director Nellie Tsai, who contacted Menard to convince her to attend a downstate conference. Once Menard agreed, Tsai told her that she had won the award.

Menard said she was surprised, but added that she could not have been recognized without her students.

“I can only do what I do with them ... If I didn’t have kids in this building who were excited about doing those types of things I wouldn’t be able to do it,” she said.

See more at:

http://www.sooeveningnews.com/article/20150521/NEWS/150529787#150529787?Start=2&_suid=143264497187303708804436710694