



Unified School District 470

119 West Washington
PO Box 1028
Arkansas City, Kansas 67005-1028

For Immediate Release
August 20, 2002

ACMS teacher wins Teacher of the Year award

Even before the events of Sept. 11, 2001, Richard Potterton has honored American values and patriotism in his classroom. For 31 years, this inspirational teacher has used innovative teaching techniques, such as storytelling, reenactments and hands-on learning, to instruct his eighth grade students in American history. Students who have been out of school for many years still recall the vivid details of American history Potterton taught them.

Potterton recently was awarded the VFW Third District Teacher of the Year. VFW Commander Leslie Block presented the award to Potterton during one of his history classes Friday, Aug. 16.

Ann Headrick, eighth grade English teacher at Arkansas City Middle School, nominated Potterton, eighth grade American history teacher at ACMS, for the award.

"He's had many, many years of service to the district," Headrick said. "[American values and patriotism are] not just something he teaches on special days; he puts those values in his classroom all year long. He's very deserving of the award."

Headrick said that ACMS Principal Chris Anderson felt that Potterton should be nominated for the award and asked her to fill out the form and write the nomination letter.

Potterton said he was shocked when he found out he won the award. He said that he heard Headrick had nominated him, but he hadn't heard anything, so he just assumed that he didn't win.

"I just considered myself fortunate that Chris Anderson and Ann Headrick felt that [I deserved to be nominated]. I really didn't expect to win anything," he said.

Potterton decided to become a teacher because of the "outstanding" teachers he had growing up. Two of the teachers he remembers being influenced by are Velda Stewart and Ralph Miller.

"I had one outstanding teacher after another when I was a student," he said. "They looked like they were having fun. It was something I wanted to do.

"I like the eighth grade students. They're enthusiastic, willing to learn and to try new things," Potterton said. "Their enthusiasm is like a gold mine, if you can channel it."

In her letter nominating Potterton for the award, Headrick said that students learn in many ways. She said "Potterton honors all learning styles by incorporating artwork, performing arts, music, research, group projects, cooperative learning, game shows, contests and discussion."

-more-

Rather than follow the table of contents of the American history book, Potterton designs and adds units to his curriculum, which instill American values and patriotism. Such units are:

- “Herstory,” a study of the contributions of women in America;
- The minority cultures talk shows, a showcase of the accomplishments of all cultures in the United States;
- A mock trial for American independence, a portrayal by students of our founding fathers gaining independence from England; and
- A handicap awareness unit, emphasizing the point that each of us has handicaps and how handicaps shouldn’t limit our potential.

“Potterton takes his American history curriculum and masterfully adds to it to increase student interest,” Headrick said in the nomination letter. “Instead of just studying our nation’s historical sites, he brings them to life with slideshows.

“Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech could be easily read, but in Potterton’s class, King’s speech, contributions and struggles are studied to show students how difficult the battle for civil rights in the ‘60s was,” she said.

“On Veterans Day, Potterton tells the story of his own father’s military experience,” Headrick said. “It is truly a moving experience, as he displays the flag given to his father and shares the importance of respecting those who have served and are serving in our nation’s military forces.”

Potterton said that on the anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks he plans to continue teaching his Celebration of Life unit, which he says celebrates patriotism.

He said that he and his students sing patriotic songs and learn what they mean. Some of the students bring instruments and play the songs. One student shared a poem her grandfather wrote while in a World War II concentration camp.

The students share family traditions, holidays, artwork, etc. Potterton said the sky is the limit when it comes to what the class studies in the unit.

“What made this [unit] special, unfortunately, is that we were doing this before Sept. 11, so it became more important,” he said.

-30-

For more information:

Kristen Martinez, Director of Public Relations
USD 470 Arkansas City
119 West Washington Avenue
Arkansas City, KS 67005-1028
Phone: 620-441-2000
Fax: 620-441-2009
E-mail: kmartinez@arkcity.com