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## Educators' award-winners announced

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Educators who use the arts to teach academics, travel the country's farthest reaches to make science lessons real and help some of the lowest functioning special education students gain job skills were named 2008 Dwyer Award winners.

The annual awards recognize excellence in teaching in five categories: elementary, middle and high school teaching, as well as special programs and career education.



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The winners were:

- Jeffrey Fessler of U. B. Kinsey Elementary
- Elizabeth Eubanks of St. Mark Catholic School
- Dianne Douglas of John I. Leonard High
- Stephanie Gilbert of Park Vista Community High for special programs
- Sandra Coster of Wellington Landings Community Middle for career education

The Economic Council of Palm Beach County and the Education Foundation of Palm Beach County presented the 24th annual awards Monday at the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts.

Each winner received \$3,000 and a crystal

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Students analyzed Salvador Dali's "Swans Reflecting Elephants" to practice determining the author's, or in this case, the painter's purpose.

Eubanks, a science teacher, works during school breaks to keep her lessons on the cutting edge. Last summer, she spent two weeks in the Pacific Ocean collecting data on Mako and Blue sharks through a National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration Teacher at Sea Fellowship.

While on her trip, she wrote Web logs for her students and answered their questions by email. When she returned, she created lesson plans based on her experience. In one, she taught students to plot the current location of sharks she had tagged. This summer, Eubanks will spend a month in Barrow, Alaska conducting research with a Florida International University professor on greenhouse gas emissions from the arctic permafrost.

A 30-year veteran, Douglas starts each class with an assignment "All About Me." Based on what students write about themselves, Douglas personalizes her approach.

One student wrote about Douglas: "You can always talk to her and she won't judge you or make you feel bad. Whenever you need her, she's always there."

Gilbert, a special education teacher who works with some of the lowest functioning students, created an On-the-Job career placement program. She sought partnerships with businesses where her students could learn meaningful work. She also obtained a special bus license so that she could transport her students to work. In class, Gilbert covers everything from hygiene to building resumes. She is also a former Special Olympics Coach of the Year.

flame sculpture. Twenty finalists won \$500 and a framed certificate.

Teachers are judged on professional ability, leadership, activities outside the classroom, interview performance and letters of recommendation.

The awards honor outstanding educators from public and private schools in Palm Beach County and were created to promote high standards in education.

Fessler came to teaching after a career in urban planning. But he quickly found his hopes of making a difference would be challenged by an all-encompassing focus on FCAT.

"I watched this test turn classrooms into test prep centers, and instruction into mindless drill and kill exercises," Fessler wrote in his Dwyer application.

Eschewing the FCAT mania, Fessler instead turned to the arts to prepare his students for the test. He taught students to compare and contrast, an important FCAT skill, by playing Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake Opus 20 Suite 1 and Barbara Streisand's "The Swan" from Funny Girl.

Coster taught boys who thought the stove was a special contraption used only by mothers to bake cakes and biscuits. In cooking demonstrations in Family and Consumer Science classroom - the old Home Ec - she made "whammo" her trademark long before Emeril began shouting "bam." Coster earned her reading certification and includes reading, science and math skills in all of her lessons.

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