Jamie Whitley named 2019 Rotary Teacher of the Year

When presenting Petoskey High School's Jamie Whitley with the Rotary Club of Petoskey's Teacher of the Year award for 2019, club member John Hurd offered some insight into what prompted the honoree's selection.

"It's been said the mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains, the superior teacher demonstrates and the great teacher inspires," said Hurd, who chairs Rotary's Teacher of the Year committee. "It's clear to me and the Rotary selection committee that today we're in the presence of greatness."

The award, presented to Whitley during a Rotary meeting Wednesday at Stafford's Perry Hotel, recognizes her contributions both in and outside the classroom.

For the past 27 years, Petoskey Rotary has annually honored one area teacher who inspires students in a unique way.

"Each one of us owes much of who we are and what we've achieved to a great teacher that's changed our lives and has inspired us," Hurd said. "We have lots of good teachers here, it's been quite remarkable..."
and that doesn't happen without good leadership, the students and nurturing teaching. My kudos to the school board, support staff, principals (and Petoskey school district chief financial officer) Kent Cartwright and (school superintendent) John Schofield.

A Charlevoix native, Whitley has been a science teacher at Petoskey High School for the past 10 years. She is the daughter of Ed and Cindy Whitley, who worked, respectively, as the electric/ water superintendent and superintendent for the City of Charlevoix and as a paraprofessional at Charlevoix Public Schools.

Jamie Whitley attended Michigan State University for her undergraduate degree in zoology and marine biology. She worked on an exhibit design at the Detroit Zoo in college before earning her teaching certificate in science and math and a master's degree in education at Ferris State University.

Whitley also earned a second master's degree at Oregon State University in management of natural resources and did internship work at the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council.

Whitley also volunteered in Africa that experience inspired her to get into teaching. She also tutored in Charlevoix and eventually was hired at Petoskey High School in 2009.

Now in her 10th year at the school, Whitley teaches general and health science, informal and honors biology and physical science. She also is heavily involved in volunteer projects, including the school's Renaissance Group, Women Who Care in Charlevoix, Thrive 45 and Science Quest Michigan.

"I love working with kids and the content," Whitley said. "The relationships you make with students and having thoughtful discussion with the students leads me to love what I do."

Petoskey High School principal Mandy Stewart said when she discovered Whitley was leaving selected, she couldn't think of a better teacher.

"You see all her volunteer activities and Jamie is a person who likes recognition," Stewart said. "She just does things because she sees a need and wants to fill the need. Not many teachers would see a hole in the curriculum for at-risk science students. She volunteered to help create it and then teach it. She said she'll take the most difficult students and will work with them to teach them something they'll need for graduation they might have a hard time passing. "She does it for the applause," Stewart said. "She truly does it because she wants kids to be successful."

Whitley said it's her students who deserve the recognition, as they push her the limit, but "in the best of ways."

"Each and every day as I attempt to expand the minds and hearts of students, it's me that changes for the better," Whitley said.

She also thanked the support and encouragement she's received from her colleagues at Petoskey High School for the past 10 years.

"Teaching is one of the hardest careers there is," Whitley said. "It's early mornings and late nights, low pay and high stress, long days and short years, unique learning styles and global expectations. I couldn't do what I do without being surrounded by many individuals, each of whom have helped me become the teacher I am today. I am lucky to work with such passionate and dedicated teachers that inspire me. To be recognized amongst them is a privilege."

As part of the Teacher of the Year recognition, Whitley received a $750 check from Petoskey Rotary, a complimentary school lunch and the complimentary school bell.

"From my students I've learned to open myself to challenges and difficult questions, to continuously strive to be better, that laughing is truly the key way to make connections and perhaps most importantly that coffee is non-negotiable," Whitley said.

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