

Three teachers named finalists in local Teacher of the Year recognition program

Three veteran teachers with combined experience in education of nearly 60 years have been selected as finalists in the Alachua County Teacher of the Year program. One of them will go on to represent Alachua County Public Schools in the Florida Teacher of the Year program.

Lilliemarie Gore, the elementary school finalist, has been the behavior resource teacher at Sidney Lanier School for nearly two years. Before joining the Lanier faculty, she taught at the Duval Fine Arts Academy and at Williams, Idylwild and Wiles elementary schools. During her career she's also been a safety patrol sponsor, school advisory council member and a coordinator for the 21st Century after-school program. She was actually selected as the districtwide Teacher of the Year in 2018.



Gore says she enjoys being able to devote individual attention to students who are struggling and then seeing positive changes in them.

"I want to encourage them, inspire them, and set a good example for them," she said. "I want them to know that they are amazing, that they can do anything and that they should never give up."



Middle school finalist Richard Thomas is the dean at Kanapaha Middle School. Before taking on that role, he worked as a 6th grade math and science teacher at the school and as a teacher at Alachua Elementary. He's also supported his students and schools as a team leader, robotics coordinator, site tech, safety patrol sponsor and a summer Extended Day Enrichment Program instructor.

Thomas is committed to helping students make progress and letting them know that there are people who support them and believe in them even when they make mistakes.

"I want them know that it's OK to make mistakes. We all do," he said. "But we learn from them, we grow from them and they help us to be the best we can be."

Karen Kearney, this year's high school finalist, teaches at Buchholz High School, the school from which she graduated. In her 21 years at the school she's taught anatomy and physiology, biology, chemistry and physical science. She's also participated in a wide variety of additional activities, including as a PTSA member, wellness coordinator, teacher mentor, department chair, assistant wrestling coach and sponsor for several school clubs.



Kearney says she wants her students to become engaged learners for the rest of their lives.

"It sounds like a cliché, but that light bulb moment is wonderful," she said. "I tell them all the time that hearing 'Ah, I get this!' is everything to me. That's why I teach, it's music to my ears."

The three finalists and 36 other nominees from Alachua County Public Schools will be honored at the upcoming Robert W. Hughes Teacher of the Year ceremony, which is named after the former Superintendent of Schools who established the program. The event is organized by The Education Foundation for Alachua County Public Schools, and the presenting sponsors include Cox, Florida Credit Union and SWI Photographers.

Each honoree will receive a \$500 cash award and other gifts donated by businesses and individuals in the community.

About 500 people typically attend the event. The name of the overall Teacher of the Year and the district's representative in the state recognition program will be announced near the end.

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