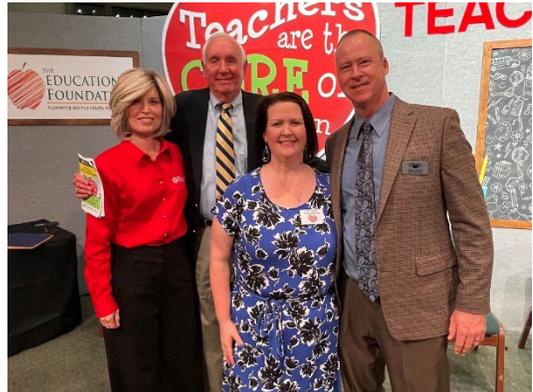


Buchholz High science teacher is Alachua County's 2023 Teacher of the Year

Karen Kearney says she wanted to teach for as long as she can remember, but her family encouraged her to pursue another career. So she did at first, working as a chiropractor. But fortunately for her past, present and future students, the desire to teach was just too strong.

"I didn't want to be 50 or 60 years old and think 'Gosh, I wish I would have...'" she said. "So I followed my passion and I went back to school and I became a teacher."

Kearney is now in her 21st year as a science teacher at Buchholz High School, her alma mater. She is also Alachua County's 2023 Teacher of the Year and will go on to represent Alachua County Public Schools in the Florida Teacher of the Year program.



Kearney's selection was announced at the annual Robert W. Hughes Teacher of the Year Ceremony, hosted by The Education Foundation for Alachua County Public Schools. The recognition program was named after Robert W. Hughes, who established it in 1993. A total of 39 honorees were recognized at the ceremony and received checks of \$500 thanks to contributions by businesses and individuals throughout the community.

Kearney was one of three finalists for the districtwide honor this year. Her co-finalists were Lilliemarie Gore, a behavior resource teacher at Sidney Lanier School, and Richard Thomas, a dean at Kanapaha Middle School.

During her remarks to an audience of about 500 people, Kearney said that teaching anatomy and physiology makes her feel like the luckiest person she knows.

"Every time a former student reaches out to me to tell me that they understood what their physician was explaining to them, or that what they've learned in my class is helping them be successful in their college classes, or when they let me know that they got in the medical field because of how much they enjoyed my class, I think to myself, 'This is why I teach! This is better than a million dollars!'"

Kearney is helping the next generation of teachers as a teacher mentor. She's also been involved with students and the school in other ways, including as a Take Stock in Children mentor, club sponsor, department chair, member of various school committees, even as a wrestling coach.

Kearney says she wants her students to keep learning long after they've left her classroom.

"I believe that knowledge is power, and that the happiest and strongest among us are those who engage in a lifelong pursuit of learning for its own sake," she said. "In addition to teaching my students science, it's my goal to encourage them to engage in this pursuit, to lead richer lives as a consequence of exploring new ideas and nourishing their imaginations."

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