

Music teachers credit D-99 fine arts culture for awards, success

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DOWNERS GROVE – Although Downers Grove South High School music teachers Glenn Williams and Laura Coster recently were honored as two of the best teachers in the state, both said decades of high expectations at both district high schools created an environment for success.

“There’s a culture of excellence that goes beyond South,” said Williams, the school’s fine arts chair. “It’s district-wide and a point of pride.”

The two found out they were among the three educators who received the 2017 Mary Hoffman Award of Excellence, given to top music educators in the Illinois Music Education Association at any school level.

Coster, who is retiring at the end of the school year after 34 years of teaching at the district, said she was honored to receive the award named for her former professor.

“One of the most rewarding parts

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was talking with people and talking with former students and it being a wonderful affirmation," she said. "But I'm also thankful for this school and the history of the music program here. It's always been strong and was strong before I came here and will be strong when I leave."

Williams, who nominated Coster for the award, said she demonstrated a "longitudinal commitment to – and demonstration of – excellence" and innovation in leading the school's choirs.

Similarly, Coster said her fellow honoree was an excellent educational leader for the program who valued all fine arts and the community.

Both repeatedly pointed toward fellow educators at both North and South, a supportive district and community, and its students for their success. It's a tradition, Williams said, that started with retired fine arts chairman Diane Hires, who oversaw the department for both schools for many years and set the groundwork for cooperation.

"Even when I started here 34 years ago and the program was smaller, there was a real support of the arts in our community and at South, and they had firm traditions," Coster said. "That just gave us a foundation to build on."

Williams said that at both schools there were teachers who were leaders in



Downers Grove South High School Fine Arts Chairman Glenn Williams was among three educators who received the 2017 Mary Hoffman Award of Excellence.



Downers Grove South High School music teacher Laura Coster was among three educators who received the 2017 Mary Hoffman Award of Excellence.

Photos provided

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their profession outside the confines of the school and were recognized for excellence on a statewide and national level.

"The teachers here care about kids, push them and drive them and encourage them to do whatever it takes to grow to their capacity," Williams said.

Just as important, students could look back at years of hard work and success in past generations of aspir-

ing musicians and dream of their own success – something Brayer Teague, fine arts chairman at Downers Grove North, agreed with and saw at North.

"I think success breeds success," he said. "We've been fortunate to have a long history of programmatic and individual student success. It does create a culture students want to be a part of."

Teague said two Hoffman award winners from the same school winning in the same year was "unprecedented" and spoke to the quality of instruction happening at South.

"At its core, Glenn and I both feel as department chairs really fortunate to work with unbelievably talented teachers, all the way through visual arts and music arts," he said.

Top teachers

Notable accomplishments and positions for fine arts teachers in District 99:

- **BRAYER TEAGUE:** DGN fine arts chair – ILMEA state president, top 10 finalist for Grammy Teacher of the Year
- **CRAIG ROSELIEB:** DGS – ILMEA State Jazz Division president
- **JENNIFER MULLEN:** D-99 orchestra director – ILMEA District 1 Orchestra Division co-chairman
- **BETH O'RIORDIAN:** DGN – ILMEA District 1 Choral Division co-chairman
- **JOY BELT-ROSELIEB:** DGS – All-State Honors choir chairman
- **MARTY VOELKER:** DGN – IAEA Art Educator of the Year
- **MICHELLE LYNN:** DGN – Outstanding Photographic Arts Educator of the Year by the Photographic Society of America