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ALUMNA TO RECEIVE PRESIDENTIAL AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

USF St. Petersburg College of Education alumna and adjunct faculty member Janet Acerra is one of 213 mathematics and science teachers who will receive the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Winners receive a $10,000 award from the National Science Foundation and are invited to receive their awards at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. on Thursday, Sept. 8.

“The recipients of this award are integral to ensuring our students are equipped with critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are vital to our Nation’s success,” President Obama said in a press release announcing the award. “As the United States continues to lead the way in the innovation that is shaping our future, these excellent teachers are preparing students from all corners of the country with the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics skills that help keep us on the cutting-edge.”

Acerra, who graduated with a Master of Arts in Elementary Education in 2002, is a 32-year veteran of Pinellas County Schools. She serves as a fifth grade teacher at Forest Lakes Elementary School in Oldsmar.

“I am incredibly honored to have been selected to represent Florida for an award that is truly beyond my wildest dreams,” said Acerra, who readily admits that science is her passion and loves to impart her knowledge and excitement with students. “Being recognized by the President of the United States is an affirmation of my beliefs about the importance of science teaching and learning in the elementary classroom.”

Acerra said she became a teacher because she always loved helping others and wanted to share. As someone who enjoyed singing and acting, she saw teaching as a way to integrate the fun she had on stage with the lessons she could design and deliver in a classroom setting. Her master’s degree from USFSP served to further enhance her career as an educator.

“USFSP offered an incredible opportunity for me to work with a cohort of other educators to learn together about both the pedagogy and the subject matter that I was teaching,” Acerra said. “I left the university feeling energized about what I teach, and valued in my choice of careers.”
After graduation, she was invited in 2003 to begin teaching science and math as an adjunct faculty member in the USFSP College of Education to share her experiences in the classroom.

“I get to work with grown-ups, too, preparing the teachers who will be taking over for me when I retire,” Acerra said, who said she wishes to impart her knowledge and share her insight with pre-educator students. “I feel that I am now able to impact not only my fifth graders at Forest Lakes Elementary, but that I also get the unique opportunity to help mold the teachers of tomorrow.”

Acerra was named as a finalist for the award both in 2014 and 2010, and has received a number of other accolades over the last 16 years. Acerra was the recipient of the 2014 Governor’s Shine Award, which recognizes Floridians who have positively impacted children through education. In 2007, she received the Part-Time Teaching Excellence Award from USFSP. In 2005, she was named Pinellas County Outstanding Educator of the Year. Acerra was named Elementary Teacher of the Year by the Florida Association of Teachers in 2000, and she has received more than $23,000 in grant money, including the Toyota Tapestry Award.

“She receives excellent evaluations from the students enrolled in the courses she teaches and we are very pleased to have the benefit of her expertise,” said Dr. Bill Heller, dean of the College of Education, who added that Acerra has received. “We join her many colleagues in congratulating her on achieving this very special recognition as one of the best teachers in the United States.”
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