

**October 30, 2009**

### **Teacher of the Year Finalists Announced Today**

The Newton County School System and the Newton County Chamber of Commerce are pleased to announce the top three finalists for Newton County's 2010 Teacher of the Year award.

After reading essays submitted by each of the school system's 23 Teachers of the Year, a panel of seven judges spent both Monday and Tuesday morning interviewing each of the teachers. The three candidates earning the highest point totals and thus entering the final round of the judging are, in alphabetical order: Ms. Gail Bemis, Livingston Elementary School; Ms. Laurie Carpenter, Fairview Theme School; and Ms. Melanie Sheets, Heard-Mixon Elementary School. On Tuesday, November 3, the Teacher of the Year selection committee will observe each of the three finalists their classroom and the teacher with the highest combined score on the essay, interview, and observation will be announced as the 2010 Teacher of the Year during a special ceremony at Newton High School on Thursday, November 12 at 4:45 p.m.

This morning, Newton County School Superintendent, Dr. Steve Whatley; Deputy Superintendent Dr. Dennis Carpenter; Associate Superintendent Dr. Linda Hayden; and school board members Eddie Johnson and Dr. C.C. Bates surprised each of the finalists with flowers and balloons in their classrooms to make the special announcement to the teachers that they were one of the top three finalists. Friends and family members of the three finalists were also invited to join in on the surprise visits.

**Ms. Gail Bemis** has been employed with Newton County Schools since 1980. She currently teaches third grade at Livingston Elementary School. Ms. Bemis previously taught second grade at East Newton Elementary School and West Newton Elementary School. Prior to joining Newton County Schools, Ms. Bemis taught third grade at Fitzgerald Elementary School.

Ms. Bemis earned her Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Georgia in 1979 and her Master's in Early Childhood Education from Georgia State in 1983. She holds additional certification as a Teacher Support Specialist. Ms. Bemis has presented science workshops at the Georgia Science Teachers Convention and reading and storytelling workshops at the Georgia International Reading Association and the Georgia Children's Book Award Convention. She has also conducted storytelling sessions and programs at the Young Writers Conference in Rockdale County and in several schools in Newton and Putnam counties.

Ms. Bemis has served as mentor to many beginning teachers and as Cooperating Teacher to ten student teachers and several practicum students. She has served as grade level chair and on the Leadership



team at her schools and has helped develop curriculum maps and write language arts units for the county to use. She is a member of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators and was the Newton County Teacher of the Year in 1988 and a finalist for Newton County Teacher of the Year in 1998.

“It's hard to believe that I've been teaching for 30 years,” said Bemis, “but I can honestly say that I love it as much today as the day I started.”

**Ms. Laurie Carpenter** has been employed with Newton County Schools since 2007, when she was hired as a second grade teacher at Ficquett Elementary School. Ms. Carpenter currently serves as a second grade teacher at Fairview Theme School. Prior to joining Newton County Schools, Ms. Carpenter taught at Highlands Elementary School, St. Elizabeth's Catholic School, and First Presbyterian ELC.



Ms. Carpenter began her teaching career in 1992 after earning her Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from Kansas State University. In 1995 Ms. Carpenter earned her Master's Degree in Elementary Education from Mid-America Nazarene University.

Ms. Carpenter has served as a teacher representative for her school's first School Site Council and served as the Student Council Sponsor and Math Club Sponsor. In addition, Ms. Carpenter served as a cooperating teacher for two student teachers and currently serves as the Technology Teacher Leader at her school and as a teacher representative for the school PTO.

“I am so surprised and honored to be a part of this elite group of the Top Three Teachers of the Year for the Newton County School System,” said Carpenter. “I never dreamed that when my class got settled to read the ‘Spooky Stories’ they had written this week after our school-wide book character parade that I would be receiving flowers from Dr. (Steve) Whatley in my clown costume! What a thrill for me, my family, and our school community. I am very proud to be recognized.”

**Ms. Melanie Sheets**, a fourth-grade teacher at Heard-Mixon Elementary School, began her teaching career in Newton County in 1992 and has been here ever since. Before moving to Heard-Mixon in 2007, Ms. Sheets taught kindergarten and second grade at Ficquett Elementary School.

Ms. Sheets earned her Bachelor's in Music in Piano Performance from Birmingham-Southern in 1979 and



attended graduate school in Princeton where she studied and earned her Master's in Music in Piano Performance and Pedagogy from Westminster Choir College in 1983. She taught music at Princeton and became the director for The New School for Music Study. Although she enjoyed her time at Princeton she yearned to come home to Georgia. At the encouragement of her husband, she went back to school to become a public school teacher and in 1992 she earned her Master's in Education in Early Childhood from Georgia State University.

Ms. Sheets serves as grade level team leader, United Way coordinator and has chaired several faculty committees at her school. She has also supervised several student teachers and has been instrumental in encouraging gifted paraprofessionals to pursue college degrees and certification. Ms. Sheets is a member of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators.

"I am surprised and thrilled and humbled," said Sheets. "What an honor!"

The Newton County School System would like to congratulate each of the Teachers of the Year, as they are all worthy of this special honor. As such, all 23 Teachers of the Year will be recognized at the reception at Newton High School, with the two runners-up each receiving a crystal vase. The 2010 Newton County Teacher of the Year will also receive a crystal vase, one dozen roses, a limo ride to work and dinner compliments of Covington Ford, and a check for \$1,000. In addition, this year's winner will also represent Newton County School System in the Georgia Teacher of the Year competition.

Newton County's Teacher of the Year program would not be possible if it were not for the support of our community. As a result, the Newton County School System and the Newton County Chamber of Commerce would like to extend special thanks to the Chamber Champions, sponsors of the 2010 Teacher of the Year program: Bank of North Georgia; The Covington News; BB&T; Georgia Directory Company; United Bank of Covington; Patillo Construction; Newton Federal Bank; Snapping Shoals EMC; Newton Citizen; Sunbelt Builders; Bizzy Bee Exterminators; Georgia Power; Tread Technologies Company; Essex Bank; Newton Medical Center; Pinnacle Bank; and Mosely Electric.

For more information on the Newton County School System Teacher of the Year program, contact Ms. Sherri Viniard, Director of Public Relations for Newton County Schools at 770-784-2908.

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