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Greer receives WKU educator award

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Longtime theater teacher Carolyn Greer, right, reacts to being surprised for winning the Western Kentucky University Distinguished Educator Award for Visual and Performing Arts presented by Susan Keesey, left, director of the School of Teacher Education at WKU, and Corinne Murphy, dean of the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, at the university on Monday in the auditorium at Owensboro High School.

Photos by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer | awarren@messenger-inquirer.com

Owensboro High School theater teacher Carolyn Greer received the Western Kentucky University Distinguished Educator Award for Visual and Performing Arts on Monday.

“I’m shocked; I’m truly honored and overwhelmed,” she said. “This is not why I do what I do. I do it for all of the kids.”

Greer said she knew she was nominated and that she had been selected as a finalist, but had no indication that she had won the award prior to Monday’s announcement at the high school.

“In no way, shape or form did I expect to receive this honor,” she said. “It was a lovely surprise.”



After a 31-year career and 25 years at OHS, Greer said she still has a couple more to go before she can retire.

“I’m grateful every day that I get to go to work and have this job and to have worked with all of the children that I have worked with,” she said. “This is not something that plays in my mind. I was thrilled to be in the top three, but to be this far in my career and receive this recognition, it’s a true honor.”

Greer’s work in education didn’t stop when she left the school building as she has inspired her children, Grae Greer and Brie Murray, to become educators as well.

Murray is a behavioral specialist at Sutton Elementary School and Grae Greer is an adjunct theater professor at Owensboro Community & Technical College.

“She has passion not just for theater and the arts, but passion for being an educator,” Grae Greer said. “She taught us that there’s ways to make everyone feel seen and heard and acknowledged and overall loved. I think that’s something we’ve both carried within our teaching professions.”

Murray said her mother has taught her that everyone, no matter their position, plays an important role.

“The cafeteria staff, the custodians,” she said. “Every single person in this building has a lot to give and without them, she would not be able to do any of her jobs.”

Both said she is deserving of this award.

“I cried because I don’t think there’s anybody more deserving of this award,” Grae Greer said. “Mother aside, she was our teacher, so we see that value, too.”

Murray said Greer works “incredibly hard” for her students.

“She makes sure every single student of hers feels seen,” she said. “Anywhere from the tech students who don’t want to speak very much, to her special education students who she includes in stage. There’s not a student in this building who isn’t touched by Carolyn Greer in some way.”

Several of Greer’s peers submitted video nominations explaining why she deserved to receive the award.

Former OHS Principal Anita Burnette said she first met Greer was when she came to teach arts and humanities at the school.

“I wanted to get the drama program and Rose Curtain Players active again,” Burnette said. “She took that program and brought it back probably better than it was before.”

Playwright Lindsey Price said she has worked with Greer for almost a decade premiering three full length plays at OHS with her students under her direction.

“Carolyn is dedicated to providing unique opportunities to her students,” she said. “She’s constantly modeled what it is like to work with a theater professional and pushed her students to grow within this developed environment.”

Tom Stites, fine arts coordinator for Owensboro Public Schools, said during the 14 years he has worked with Greer, there has been “wonderful growth” within the theater department.

“The driver there is Greer and her unending passion for working with kids of all types, all sizes and all talents within theater,” he said. “The thing I cherish most about Carolyn is how she finds talent with students that I never would have spotted myself as a lifelong educator.”

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