

Teachers of the Year honored with grant

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(Photo: Photo courtesy of the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation)

The Great Falls Public Schools Foundation and BNSF Railways named the two teachers selected for the 2017 Teachers of the Year Award on Wednesday evening.

This year's winners are Beth Thomas, a Great Falls High freshman science teacher, and Lisa Shull, an East Middle School orchestra director.

Thomas and Shull were selected by a panel of local business and education leaders from a pool of 33 Excellence in Education teachers nominated by distinguished seniors from all three Great Falls high schools.

Both teachers will receive a \$2,500 grant to purchase classroom supplies or to use toward continuing education.

Thomas was nominated by GFH senior Ophelia Easton.

"I went to Costa Rica with her for an ecological exploration of the rainforests and to work with leather-back sea turtles," Easton said.

Easton said Thomas helped her build her self confidence and to learn to trust that she can accomplish anything she wants.

"She's very outgoing and supportive of kids that are not the most social or popular," Easton said. "She supports diverse students."

Thomas has been teaching for 24 years and incorporates cross-curricular ideas into her lessons. Thomas is currently in the middle of the Prairie Expeditions program with her students. The program takes students out of the classroom and provides them with the opportunity to learn about preserving the Montana landscape. Prairie Expeditions is funded by a Dream Big grant from the GFPSF.

Shull was nominated by GFH senior Alan Tong. Tong credits Shull as the reason he plays violin and loves creating music.

"She works hard outside the classroom," Tong said. She was very formative during my middle school years."



Alan Tong nominated East Middle School orchestra director Lisa Shull for the 2017 Teachers of the Year Award. (Photo: Photo courtesy of the Great Falls Public Schools Foundation)

Shull has been teaching for almost 35 years and is a member of the Great Falls Symphony, String Orchestra of the Rockies and founded the East Fiddlers orchestra club.

The East Fiddlers played the prelude to the ceremony while Shull accompanied them on piano.

"Our panel was absolutely thrilled to read about these amazing applicants and we really appreciate BNSF and all of our judges for taking the time to support our amazing Great Falls educators," Dave Crum, executive director of the GFPSF, said.

This is the third year BNSF has awarded the Teachers of the Year Award and sponsored the Excellence in Education Ceremony.

"The winners of the 2017 BNSF Teacher of the Year Award are inspiring, passionate Montanans, and they continuously look to find new ways to engage students in the learning process," Ross Lane, regional director of public affairs for BNSF Railway, said. "We are excited BNSF can once again honor not only our two winners, but celebrate all teachers in the community, who help shape a bright future for our state."

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