

Three city teachers win Golden Apples

7 in all earn Harrisburg diocese award

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Teachers at Catholic schools in Lancaster broke the record for the 2010 Golden Apple Awards.

Of the seven teachers in the Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg who won \$5,000 awards for professional excellence, three are from Lancaster.

They are Sylvia Buller, fourth-grade teacher at Resurrection Catholic School; Donna Copeland, kindergarten teacher at St. Anne; and Christine McLean, fourth-grade teacher at St. Leo the Great. All three are coincidentally graduates of Millersville University.

The awards ceremony will be held at 6 p.m. Tuesday, May 11, at Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg.

This is the fifth year the diocese, with more than 1,000 teachers serving more than 12,500 students in 45 schools in 15 counties, has given the prestigious awards, funded by the Donahue Family Foundation of Pittsburgh.

Lancaster teachers have always been among the winners, but this is the first year three of them have been recognized at the same time.

"All three of us want to keep Catholic education vibrant and healthy in Lancaster County at a time when enrollment is dropping, tuition is increasing, the economy is bad and there are lots of good schools in the area," said McLean, of East Hempfield Township.

McLean and her husband, Steven, are the parents of three children, ages 19-15, all in or about to enter college.

An accountant and then a stay-at-home mom before becoming a teacher, McLean is the novice of the trio, with just eight years in teaching. Copeland has been teaching 32 years, 25 at St. Anne; Buller, 29 years, all at Resurrection and its predecessor, the former St. Mary's Catholic School.

"The diocese was the only place I put in an application," said Buller, of East Hempfield Township, wife of Dave and mother of Kristy Buller, a former Lancaster Newspapers correspondent.

Being considered for the award is no easy task. Candidates are nominated by colleagues, parents or students, who then encourage others to write letters of recommendation.

Candidates must submit personal essays and secure letters of recommendation from principals and priests.

Buller, a graduate of the former Sacred Heart Catholic School and Lancaster Catholic High School, was nominated by the Collister and Hamri families. She said she believes they nominated her for her ability to adapt to their children's needs."

"You can't teach the old-fashioned way," she said. "You have to find a way to accommodate each child."

Buller credits the Sisters of Mercy, who ran the former St. Mary's School, for everything she learned about teaching.

"They taught me three things," she said, "to be flexible, to always see the best in kids and to know that the reward is not monetary."

Just as public school teachers, who earn much more, all Lancaster Catholic school teachers are fully certified by the state.

In addition, the diocese requires its teachers to earn religious education certification on three levels: basic, advanced and ongoing.

The teachers met for this interview at St. Leo, where after teaching, Buller and McLean attended a class on Christology.

McLean serves as religion coordinator at St. Leo.

"It's important to remember we are a Catholic school," she said, "that teaching religion is as important as other content areas."

Unlike Buller and McLean, Copeland, of Lancaster, is a convert to Catholicism.

"Because of my teaching and going to Mass with my students, I became a Catholic in 1994," she said. "I saw the community of school and church. I felt a calling, that it was God's plan for me to be at St. Anne and to become a Catholic. I'm very proud (to win this award)."

For her essay, Copeland wrote about her favorite teacher, William Haggerty, who she had in sixth grade at McGuire Air Force Base.

"I remember memorizing poems, drawing maps. He was strict but fun. There was

a lot of learning. He enjoyed what he did.

"I always enjoy getting up in the morning and going to work. I read recently that 45 percent of the people don't like their jobs. That's definitely not me!"