



ELEMENTARY

NEWSBREAK

Elementary teacher excellence awardee

Sandra Cavanaugh to be honored by Technology Education Association of Pennsylvania in November

IT'S ONLY BEEN FIVE YEARS since Sandra Cavanaugh graduated from college and became a teacher in the Canon-McMillan School District. Now she is being honored with the 2008 Elementary (technology education) Teacher Excellence Award in Pennsylvania.

The Technology Education Association of Pennsylvania (TEAP) will present the award to Cavanaugh at its 56th annual conference at Camp Hill in November. At that time, excellence awards for middle school and high school tech. ed. teachers also will be presented.

Cavanaugh was nominated for the award at the end of the last school year by the TEAP president, Jared Bitting.

"It's an honor to be chosen out of the entire state," says

Cavanaugh. "There are not as many elementary tech. ed. programs in the state as there are in middle schools and high schools, but many of them are very good."

Cavanaugh was a stay-at-home mom of three children. She and her husband are empty nesters now that the children are grown. She also worked in a print shop for many years. But she wanted to be a teacher and believed it is never too late to make your dream come true.

She attended California University of Pennsylvania, earning a bachelor's degree in 2003 and a master's in 2005.

Canon-McMillan hired Cavanaugh as its first elementary technology education teacher. Being the first on the job allowed her flexibility in creating the new program for fifth- and sixth-grade students.



**SANDRA
CAVANAUGH**
ELEMENTARY
TECHNOLOGY
EDUCATION TEACHER
AT CANON-MAC

“It’s an honor to be chosen out of the entire state.”

SHE CREDITS THE DISTRICT'S

administrators for always “giving the green flag to advance my program,” says Cavanaugh. “Each year I have new experiences and a greater passion for this job. I keep on top of things. It makes me more certain that these are important learning experiences we are giving our students.

“I teach a lot of problem-solving using the engineering design process, that’s the foundation of technology. It’s a way of thinking. When students learn design, they can solve any problem in any class.”

The elementary tech. ed. program at Canon-McMillan has grown with Cavanaugh teaching fifth- and sixth-graders at both Cecil and North Strabane intermediate schools. A second teacher instructs tech. ed. to third- and fourth-graders in Canon-McMillan’s seven elementary schools. Those nine schools comprise the elementary program at Canon-McMillan.

This is what Cavanaugh’s students will be learning this year:

GRADE 5 – Alternative energy is explored, specifically electricity and wind energy, using the district’s wind turbine located on the campus of North Strabane Intermediate School. Students will be building their own windmills. They will learn about construction and forces through bridge building. And they will have an introduction to robotics in a new program.



Students are excited to see their tankbot (robot) performing as programmed.

GRADE 6 – Students will learn about magnetic levitation (maglev) vehicles, robotics, flight (airplanes), and solar power using solar panels.

The classes, which use much hands-on work, have generated a great deal of enthusiasm among her young students.

“The students’ excitement has been really high since Day 1 about what we do and what we learn. There’s never a dull moment. The students want to learn and the activities support the learning.”

A non-traditional student, meaning she began college older than most college students, Cavanaugh has made up for lost time by creating an impressive program at Canon-McMillan. She is also earning a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

But of her time in the intermediate schools' classrooms she says, "This is what I wanted to do when I was in college, but never thought I would have the chance because not many districts have full-time elementary tech. ed. teachers.

"I love this job and there is a real need because the No Child Left Behind Act is beginning technology assessments in the schools."

What's in the future for Cavanaugh?

She's torn between someday teaching tech. ed. teachers on the college level and staying in the classroom with young students.

For now, she is happy that her hard work with Canon-McMillan students is being recognized across the state and may encourage other districts to take up technology education in their elementary classrooms. ■

“I love this job and there is a real need because the No Child Left Behind Act is beginning technology assessments in the schools.”

