

Chippewa Valley teachers win Excellence in Education awards



Dakota High School teacher Angela LoPiccolo was selected as a 2016 Michigan Lottery Excellence in Education Award winner, and met Michigan State University Men's Basketball Coach Tom Izzo on Dec. 16. Photo courtesy of CLAIRE BRISSON

By Nicole Tuttle , For The Macomb Daily

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Erie Elementary School teacher Janet Frye received a 2016 Michigan Lottery Excellence in Education Award, entitling her, her husband Dwayne Frye and their sons to meet Michigan State University Men's Basketball Coach Tom Izzo on Dec. 16. Pictured are Dwayne Frye, Trevor Frye, Janet Frye, Tom Izzo and Kyle Frye. Photo courtesy of CLAIRE BRISSON

Three Chippewa Valley Schools district teachers will be able to do some extra holiday shopping this year for themselves and their students, as they recently received 2016 Michigan Lottery Excellence in Education Awards.

Erie Elementary School art teacher Janet Frye, Dakota High School construction trades teacher Joe Churches, and Dakota High School social studies teacher Angela LoPiccolo all received their awards from Michigan State University Men's Basketball Coach Tom Izzo on Dec. 16 at Michigan State University in East Lansing.

The teachers each received a \$500 cash prize, an additional \$500 for their classrooms, a plaque, and a special behind-the-scenes tour of Breslin Center. The teachers also spent 30 minutes hearing Izzo speak in the room where MSU basketball players watch game film. In addition, the teachers participated in one-on-one interviews with Izzo which will be aired locally on WXYZ Channel 7's news broadcasts.

"Each winner was invited into Coach Izzo's office where the interview was taped by the Fox network. The coach also presented me with a large replica of the \$500 check that I received. My family was photographed with me and Coach Izzo and they got to stay in the office during the interview, behind the scene," Frye said.

Churches said he spoke with Izzo about building homes and his teaching philosophy at Dakota, located in Macomb Township.

Frye said there were 34 winners of the award out of 300 nominations. Frye also said she was nominated by Erie's music teacher Erica Latowski. She first learned of her win from a Dec. 3 e-mail.

LoPiccolo was nominated by fellow Dakota social studies teacher Monica Eraqi.

Churches was nominated by Chippewa Valley Director of Career and Technical Education Claire Brisson, and received a phone call letting him know he won the award. Brisson said that the trip to MSU was very organized and personal for the teachers, with half of the award recipients coming on Dec. 16 and the others scheduled for another day.

"About 18 teachers who won this award gathered at the Breslin Center at MSU on Dec. 16 to be presented with the prize money and plaque and to be interviewed by Tom Izzo. He asked three questions in regards to the statement made on the nomination testimonial. He asked specific questions regarding my impact as an art educator to the students at Erie and my impact as a mentor to new teachers," Frye said.

Frye further said she will use the classroom prize money to enhance this school year's art curriculum for the more than 500 students she teaches at the Clinton Township school.

"I was so impressed with Coach Izzo's respect for educators. He emphasized the daily challenges educators have with the ever changing family dynamics of the 21st century. Educators have so much more responsibility nowadays in molding our students to be respectful, intellectual and productive members of society. He reminded us all of our important impact we have on insisting that students put forth their best effort on whatever they pursue and that to be successful takes a lot of hard work," Frye said.

LoPiccolo said she plans to purchase teaching resources and new technology with the money designated for the classroom. Churches said he plans to use classroom prize money to assist students planning to go to Las Vegas in January.

"I have got a group going to Las Vegas to the International Builder's Show..." Churches said.

Churches said he had "not met a finer gentleman" than Izzo and admired Izzo's teamwork view of student player, parent and coach.

"He was up there talking to the group about what he does, his coach's philosophy and how he handles players. I like what he does with his players..." Churches said.

Although she is an Oakland University graduate, LoPiccolo said what she will remember most about meeting Izzo was his respect for the teaching profession.

“Basically he talked about how important teachers are...” LoPiccolo said.

Frye said that although she is a Wayne State University graduate, her son Kyle Frye is a graduate of MSU and her son Trevor Frye is a junior at MSU.

“I was so happy that my family was there to witness this award and listen to Coach Izzo’s motivational speech on the importance of educators. We really enjoyed our time spent with Coach Izzo. I’m so honored that I have been recognized for my dedication and commitment to my students and staff members here at Erie,” Frye said.

The behind-the-scenes tour of the Breslin Center included viewing trophies, according to Frye.

“We took a tour of the administrative offices and saw the numerous awards that the MSU team has won over the years. They have two beautiful National Champion trophies amongst the many Big 10 and Conference Champ trophies. There’s a spot saved for the 2016 National Championship trophy that the coach hopes to earn with this year’s currently undefeated team,” Frye said.

LoPiccolo, Frye and Churches’ televised segments are set to air locally in March 2016.