

Teachers receive statewide honors

By Jennifer Moody
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Teachers at both South Albany and West Albany high schools have been named Oregon Teachers of the Year in their respective disciplines.

South Albany's Pam Bene was honored by the Oregon Association for Family and Consumer Sciences as the Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher of the Year.

At West, P.E. teacher Danielle Blackwell was named Oregon's Teacher of the Year by the Oregon Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

Bene's award was based on the excellence she has achieved with the Child Development program at South Albany, said Chris Ward, chairman of the award committee.

The program is open to children ages 3 and older and is staffed by Bene with two education assistants and three or four student aides.

"I am especially appreciative of the contributions she has made as a mentor teacher for many of OSU's teacher education students," Ward wrote to the district.

Bene is in her 16th year at South and her 33rd year of teaching. She learned of the award in August at a joint state-national convention of the Association for Family and Consumer Studies.

"It was a surprise. I've never been one to aspire for that kind of recognition, although it was flattering," she said. "There are so many good teachers, it was humbling to be selected."

Bene received a plaque and may advance to the national competition, although that takes place only every couple of years, she said.

"More than anything, it validates that what I do matters and it's with the students that I most care about," she said. "Teaching is a work that you have to do with your heart. To have that work recognized is very flattering."

Danielle "Dani" Blackwell learned of her award last summer and received it Oct. 12 at an alliance conference. She is now eligible to move on to the district competition, the winner of which will be named next August.

She was nominated last spring and had to complete essays on how she conducts her program, uses different methods to meet her students' needs, participates in professional development, gives leadership presentations and serves as a positive role model.

Blackwell is in her eighth year at West Albany and her ninth of teaching P.E. She said she was honored by the award, but the best part has been sharing what she does with people who have come to observe her work because of the award.

Students in Blackwell's classes create their own fitness plans and take part in nontraditional P.E. activities such as rock climbing, Ultimate Frisbee and tawkra, an Asian game that combines elements of soccer and badminton.

They take turns not only playing sports but acting as coaches, statisticians and team managers, learning the tactics that make the strategies work.