

Horn Lake assistant principal named one of country's best educators

Wins national excellence award

By Jimmie Covington

Friday, October 10, 2008

Rosie King is a person of words.

But her tears came much easier than words Thursday morning at Horn Lake Elementary School, where the state schools superintendent and a foundation official from California surprised her with a major announcement.

King was announced as one of two Mississippi recipients this year of the prestigious Milken National Education Award, which carries with it a \$25,000 check for personal use.

Aaron Wilson, a teacher at Woodley Elementary School in Hattiesburg, is the other winner. A state panel selects the recipients. Nominations are not involved in the process.

Nationally, up to 80 teachers and school administrators each year receive the award, which cites them among the nation's best. It is presented by the Milken Family Foundation of Santa Monica, Calif.

King, 30, is in her second year as Horn Lake Elementary's assistant principal after working four years as a teacher, one as an administrative intern and one as the district's reading and language specialist.

Speaking to the assembly Thursday after the announcement, King said, "I am sorry I am crying. I am crying because I am so excited. These are happy tears. ... This is such an honor. I don't know what to say ... so thank you, thank you, thank you."

The school's students, faculty members and community dignitaries had been called to the assembly supposedly to hear Dr. Hank Bounds, state superintendent of education, talk about state testing.

But when he started talking, Bounds apologized that he had had to "fib a little bit" about his reason for coming to the school.

He then introduced Jane Foley, senior vice president with the foundation. Foley took the students and others in the audience through a series of steps that led to the announcement.

After Foley described the award and said someone in the audience would receive it, King said she was trying to think which of her teachers it might be.

And then, King said later, "everything stopped" when she heard her own name announced.

After the shock, came the tears and the grasping for words. The tears continued to flow, but the words started coming back:

"You know the thing about being a teacher or an administrator and everything that we do is that it all depends on what the kids do, so what is standing behind a great educator is a bunch of great kids. I am so glad to get to be here at this school with you (the students) and get to be at this school with the best teachers in the world."

King said she wished she could give each person at the school the award "because you deserve it."

In an interview, Bounds said teachers and other educators are today's real heroes.

He said Mississippi has really good teachers and the award shows that one of the greatest in the nation is at Horn Lake Elementary.

Foley said King is in the top 1 percent of educators in the nation. She said the award is designed specifically to give King an incentive to stay in the profession.

Overall, she said the awards, which have been presented yearly since 1987, are also designed to bring recognition to the work that teachers and other educators do across the nation.

As an award winner, King will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Los Angeles in the spring to participate in the Milken National Education Conference. And she will be a part of continuing foundation programs.

DeSoto's last Milken Award winner, Carol Burton (2000), now a teacher-mentor at Hernando Elementary School, took part in Thursday's announcement.

In Mississippi's first year of participation in 1991, Connie Murphree, then a teacher at Hernando Middle School, received the award.

-- Jimmie Covington: (662) 996-1406