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Washington State Music Educator to be Named National Teacher of the Year at White House Ceremony

Washington, DC, April 25, 2007 – Growing up the daughter of an outstanding educator, Andrea Peterson knew at a young age that she wanted to serve others. It was with this mindset that she started to pursue a degree in pre-medicine. However, while visiting her brothers who were away at college studying music education, she realized that she too was drawn to teach music.

Because of her community focus, teamwork with other teachers, and a desire to see all students succeed, Peterson will be named 2007 National Teacher of the Year by President George W. Bush at a White House ceremony on April 26, 2007. Also recognized at this event will be the 2007 state teachers of the year. The National Teacher of the Year Program, sponsored by the ING Foundation, is a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

The National Teacher of the Year Program focuses public attention on teaching excellence and is the oldest and most prestigious awards program for teachers. According to Bill Jasien, senior vice president and head of education and retail market distribution at ING U.S. Financial Services, ING is proud to collaborate with CCSSO to celebrate the national and state teachers of the year. "We believe in the importance of honoring excellence in education and supporting those educators who are committed and devoted to teaching our children," Jasien said.

Peterson, a music teacher at Monte Cristo Elementary School in Granite Falls, Washington, is the 57th National Teacher of the Year. She will begin a year as a full-time national and international spokesperson for education on June 1, 2007.

When Peterson came to Granite Falls School District in 1997, there was almost no funding for a music program and there were very few available resources. According to Peterson, the secondary band program owned six percussion instruments, two of which were broken, and her elementary music room was equipped with only eight percussion instruments and twenty recorders. She lobbied the superintendent, building administrators, and the school board about the need to invest in new technologies and instruments for the program to succeed. When the district finances were not sufficient to achieve these goals, Peterson found alternative financial sources, including the school's Learning Improvement Team, Associated Student Body, parent groups, and community organizations. She credits the continued collaboration with administrators, colleagues, parents, and the community for surpassing the original goal to raise more than \$55,000 in new equipment for both instruction and performances.

In her ten years at Granite Falls, she has revitalized the music programs at both the elementary and high school levels, to the extent that an additional music faculty member was hired by the district to assist with the workload. The growth of the music program in Granite Falls School District has encouraged students to participate in county, state, and national music competitions, and to create two auditioned elementary choirs, cross-curricular performances, an auditioned high school chorus, jazz band, and marching band.

Teaching music is only part of Peterson's instruction—it serves as a vehicle to other areas. "Music is an amazing tool to unlock students' potential. The most visible benefit from their success in music is their increased confidence and self-esteem," Peterson said. "However, I don't believe it is the only benefit, nor the most powerful. It is truly exciting to see how my music teaching can transfer back to other classrooms." With this philosophy, Peterson introduced a cross-curriculum program, wherein she takes lessons taught in other classes, such as English and math, and expands upon them in an eight-week unit.

One of the most popular projects in Peterson's classes is the creation and performance of an interpretive musical, whereby students create a play from one of the books they have read in another class. Students work together to choose the music that best fits with the overall feel of the play and then perform it for the greater community. "Through Andrea's efforts these kids have helped to put Granite Falls, Washington, on the map for musical talents. Parents, staff, and community members continue to be in awe of what she is able to bring forth from the children," said Debra Rose Howell, a colleague of Peterson's at Monte Cristo Elementary School. "I believe no other music program in the state of Washington could begin to compete with what Andrea has done single-handedly!"

Joel Thaut, superintendent of Granite Falls School District, says that although some have thought it unusual for a specialist to receive the honor of teacher of the year, "in the case of Andrea Peterson it only makes sense. Mrs. Peterson's music program is not a complement to our basic education program; it is an integral part of it."

Peterson's excellent teaching skills do not only benefit her students in the classroom, but also outside. "Both of my children take pleasure in going to music class and are always very excited to show off the many things that they have learned," said Sarah Edwards, a parent at Granite Falls. "This is not just singing, but playing instruments, reading music, understanding fractions, performance behavior, and so much more. Many of these skills have transferred into other areas of their lives."

Peterson was born in Invermere, British Columbia, Canada, on August 20, 1973. She lived there until she was eight years old when her father, a teacher at the time, decided he wanted to enter the ministry, and the family relocated to San Diego, CA, for his training. After her father accepted a ministerial position in Colorado, the family remained there until the summer before her 12th-grade year when they moved to the state of Washington to be closer to aging relatives. She graduated in 1991 from Onalaska High School in Onalaska, Washington.

Peterson became a permanent resident of the United States upon her arrival in the country in 1981. She gained citizenship in 2004, saying her greatest motivation in doing so was to be a political advocate for education, one who could vote for initiatives, such as school district finance levies, that she supported and promoted.

Peterson received bachelor's degrees in music education and arts music from the University of Washington in 1996, graduating cum laude. She was the first National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) in early and middle childhood music in the state of Washington. After receiving her certification, she became a NBCT facilitator and liaison coordinator for Washington, encouraging other educators to advocate policy changes in education. She is also actively involved with the Northwest Wind Symphony, which is made up of professional educators, musicians, and community leaders in the greater Washington and Oregon area.

She is married to Joel Peterson and they have one daughter, Faith, who was born on March 24, 2007.

A committee of representatives from 15 national education organizations chooses the National Teacher of the Year from among the state teachers of the year, including those representing American Samoa, Department of Defense Education Activity, District of Columbia, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands. The other 2007 National Teacher of the Year finalists are Justin Minkel, a second grade teacher at Jones Elementary School in Springdale, Arkansas; Joshua Anderson, a speech, debate, and language arts teacher at Olathe Northwest High School in Olathe, Kansas; and Tamra.Tiong, a special education teacher at Dulce Elementary School in Dulce, New Mexico.

State teachers of the year are selected on the basis of nominations by students, teachers, principals, and school district administrators throughout the states. Applications are then submitted to CCSSO, where the national selection committee reviews the data on each state candidate and selects the four finalists. The selection committee then personally interviews each finalist before naming the National Teacher of the Year. Additional information on the National Teacher of the Year Program can be accessed at <http://www.ccsso.org/ntoy>.

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The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

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