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Obama to honor three Delaware educators

Christina teachers, UD biology professor are award recipients

By *JENNIFER PRICE*
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Two Delaware teachers and a University of Delaware professor will be honored today by President Barack Obama for excellence in mathematics and science teaching and mentoring.

Karen Fredricks, a fourth grade teacher at Christina School District's Marshall Elementary, and Jo Anne Deshon, a first grade teacher at Christina's Downes Elementary, both received the presidential teaching award in July.

Patricia A. DeLeon, professor of biological sciences and member of the UD board of trustees, received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring, which is presented each year to individuals or organizations for mentoring students studying science or engineering.

The Delaware trio will get a chance to meet and have their pictures taken with Obama at the White House before sitting in on a press conference at which the president is expected to talk about the importance of science, technology, engineering and math education.

"It's an absolute thrill to think we'll be in the same room as President Obama," Deshon said. "My heart is pounding."

In November, Obama launched the "Educate to Innovate" campaign, a nationwide effort to move American students from the middle to the top of the international pack in science and math achievement over the next decade.

Fredricks, a teacher for 32 years, started a math club at Marshall four years ago. More than 100 students come to school 30 minutes early to play math games.

"It's amazing to see so many kids excited about math," said Pattie Buchanan, the school's principal.

The Delaware teachers arrived in Washington, D.C., on Sunday for a four-day conference. While Fredricks couldn't bring her students along, she is wearing a class picture around her neck and plans to show it to Obama today.

"I'm taking them everywhere because it's really all about them," said Fredricks, 56.

Deshon, who has also taught for 32 years, has a passion for teaching science.

"Kids love exploring and experiments, and science is always hands-on," said the 56-year-old. "They never groan when you say it's time for science. They're always excited."

In addition to their paid trip to Washington, each Delaware educator received a \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation, which they can use at their own discretion.

Each year the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching alternates,

going either to science and math teachers in grades kindergarten through six or to those teaching in grades seven through 12.

The winners are selected by a panel of distinguished scientists, mathematicians and educators following an initial selection process done at the state level.

For the mentoring award, it can honor mentoring involving students at any grade level from elementary through graduate school.

DeLeon has mentored more than 100 trainees, including undergraduates, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and visiting scientists from around the world. A large majority of her undergraduate mentees are women and about one-third of them are minorities. She also has mentored young faculty in the early stages of their careers.

"Professor DeLeon has transformed the lives of many young scientists, both undergraduate and graduate students who worked in her laboratory, and young faculty members here at UD and elsewhere," UD Provost Tom Apple said.
