

Wadle Wins Wirtz Award

DeKalb High School teacher Mike Wadle had just begun his third hour algebra class on Monday when principal Dr. Lindsey Hall interrupted. Other administrators, staff, and a few students followed with balloons and a large cake. While it wasn't Wadle's birthday, it was a celebration. Wadle had just been named the winner of the 2007 Wirtz Award for Excellence in Education.



Wadle has worked for the DeKalb School District since 1982 in special education, math, and as a football coach. Wadle is well known at DeKalb High School for his dedication to students both inside and outside the classroom. DHS counselor Cindy Dugan

wrote in her letter of nomination, "An award for a teacher who excels in education by influencing, motivating, and inspiring students was established with teachers such as Mr. Wadle in mind. Mr. Wadle is effective, approachable, and accessible."

Wadle's teaching philosophy involves a nurturing environment and an emphasis on succeeding. "A classroom must be a safe environment for each student," Wadle wrote in his Wirtz application. "Each student must be given assurance that the classroom is a community, where respect for others is expected, demonstrated, and reinforced." Teachers must make it safe for students to take academic chances. Working algebra problems on the board in front of the class is one example. Fellow math teacher T. J. Fontana said of his

colleague, "while the rest of us have to pull teeth to get students to work at the board, Mike gets them there with no fuss, no excess talking, and no embarrassment. Only a great general can lead his troops so fearlessly into the battles of mathematics."

Wadle's dedication outside class is another reason he received the award. All four of the DHS staff members who wrote to the Wirtz committee on his behalf stressed his willingness to give students whatever time they need. Special education teacher Vicki Erwin said Wadle "is always willing to assist student before and after school as well as during his planning period and even during his lunch time." In addition to tutoring and advising students, Wadle also shows up at many activities to support his students. "Time is a gift to share with young people," Wadle said. "Helping students learn how to prioritize, organize and make good use of their time are ways of sharing that gift. Giving one-on-one time to a student can bridge gaps in competence and confidence."

Wadle's gift of time and skill goes beyond the DeKalb area. Beginning in 2001, Wadle and his wife, Sharon, began working in Tanzania during the summer as part of a project with DeKalb's First Lutheran Church. The Wadles train teachers in teaching methods, deliver donations for textbook purchases, and work on church and school construction. They plan to take their fifth trip to Tanzania this summer.

The official presentation of the Wirtz Award will be at the May 15 School Board meeting. This is the nineteenth annual Wirtz Award for Excellence in Education. The award was established in 1989 to honor the memory of William Wilbur Wirtz, Alfa White Wirtz, and Jeann Sohner Wirtz for whom education in the DeKalb community was a lifelong interest and commitment.