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Thursday, September 8, 2016

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DPI-NR 2016-84 A

Lake Holcombe educator named Wisconsin Special Services Teacher of the Year

Barbara VanDoorn to receive \$3,000 from Herb Kohl Educational Foundation

MADISON — In a surprise ceremony at her school, Barbara VanDoorn, a school counselor at Lake Holcombe School, was named Wisconsin's Special Services Teacher of the Year for the 2016-17 school year.

State Superintendent Tony Evers made the announcement during an all-school assembly. As part of the Teacher of the Year honor, VanDoorn will receive \$3,000 from the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation.

“Wisconsin needs talented individuals to teach in our classrooms and inspire our young people to seek out careers that will fulfill their dreams,” Evers said. “A Teacher of the Year recipient demonstrates an unwavering commitment to students, and it is an honor to recognize educators who do so much for Wisconsin’s public schools.”

“The Teacher of the Year program highlights the many contributions educators make to our children, schools, and communities,” said Herb Kohl, philanthropist and businessman, who co-sponsors the Wisconsin Teacher of the Year program through his educational foundation. “They are leaders who put forth extraordinary effort to help all children achieve.”

Having tended to students at Lake Holcombe School for 20 plus years, VanDoorn anchors her educational philosophy in the importance of showing respect, demonstrating caring, and recognizing the intelligence of individuals. “As educators, it is our job to identify the strengths and needs of each student. The counselor’s role is to take it one step further — advocating for each student in the classroom, the community, and in realizing each student’s future goals,” she said. VanDoorn sees herself as the person who helps remove obstacles for students to reach postsecondary education opportunities at colleges, tech schools, or by entering the workforce with a career. She takes every junior on at least one college tour and put into place significant supports in ACT and reading prep. Finally, she sends every college freshman from the previous year’s graduating class a care package at school in the fall. “Their transition is often difficult; they need to know someone still has faith in them.”

VanDoorn looks at the K-12 experience as a long pathway of personal growth that includes opportunities for students to engage in meaningful community service. She pairs high school basketball players with first- and

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second-grade reading buddies; middle school students build a cardboard “shanty town” and sleep in it for a night as part of a Habitat for Humanity fundraiser.

High School Principal Mark Porter, who supported VanDoorn’s nomination as a Kohl Teacher Fellow, wrote that she is a busy lady who spends her time helping others. He described walking into a meeting where VanDoorn was coordinating nine clubs, businesses, and private individuals in a Santa Giving program that serves 80 students and their families. This was in addition to her work at school, leading book clubs for a couple private groups and building and maintaining websites for the school, golf club, a volunteer fire department, and nonprofit medical site.

Looking to the future, VanDoorn sees opportunities to provide mental health support to her rural community. Last fall, she was certified as a Mental Health First Aid Instructor and has a vision for sharing the principles of mental health first aid as commonly as CPR training. She sees great promise in teaching youth, teachers, bus drivers, administrators, and parents how to access the tools they need to provide mental health support when it is needed the most.

VanDoorn graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stout with a bachelor’s degree in Child Development and Family Life, and earned her Master’s of Education in Guidance and Counseling from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Evers will recognize VanDoorn as the Wisconsin Special Services Teacher of the Year during his State of Education address Sept. 15 in Madison.

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2016_84a.pdf.