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Prestigious award is a first for a Catholic educator

Elizabeth Eubanks has made history by winning the prestigious William T. Dwyer Awards for Excellence in Education in the middle school category.

LINDA REEVES | FLORIDA CATHOLIC PALM BEACH BUREAU EDITOR

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Elizabeth Eubanks, right, a science teacher at St. Mark School, works with students, from left, Chelsea Viguera, Amy Nevitt and Kaila Louis Charles during a school science fair.

LINDA REEVES | FC



BOYNTON BEACH | A teacher at a Catholic school here has made history by winning the prestigious William T. Dwyer Awards for Excellence in Education in the middle school category. For the past 23 years, public school teachers have taken home the honors, which recognize top educators in Palm Beach County.

"She is the first Catholic school teacher recipient, to my knowledge, and had to compete with middle school teachers in both the public and private school sector," said Ann Marie Chiste, a St. Mark School parent, about Elizabeth Eubanks, 44, a science teacher at the school.

Eubanks is completing her fourth year at St. Mark and formerly taught at Holy Name of Jesus School in West Palm Beach for seven years. She was one of 12 award nominees, the only teacher out of 25 finalists from a private school, and the only person representing a Catholic institution.

"That is incredible," said Chiste. "We are truly blessed."

Winners were announced in a ceremony at the Raymond F. Kravis Center for the Performing Arts in West Palm Beach during ceremonies April 21.

"I am extremely thrilled to be the recipient of the Dwyer Award," said Eubanks, who is a native of New Orleans and parishioner of St. Mark Parish, where she plays percussion at Mass on Tuesday mornings with a small group of students from the school. She also involves St. Mark students in community service activities during the school year.

"It takes a great team to work with in order to achieve anything," Eubanks said. "I work with wonderful teachers and staff who support me. I was the only Catholic school teacher to ever receive this award. It is a success for our whole school and diocese."

Eubanks, who received a bachelor's in science and zoology from Auburn University in Alabama and a master's from Palm Beach Atlantic University, said she did not originally envision a vocation in education.

"I thought I would be a veterinarian," said Eubanks. "I love science and I love to see my students passionate about it. When I see them taking their own initiative to learn about science, I know that I have done my job."

"She is quite a lady," said Father Richard Florek, pastor of St. Mark. "She does a lot at the school."

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Last year, she was involved with a program sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. As part of the program, she went to sea for two weeks to study with researchers. During the ocean voyage, she stayed in constant contact with many of her students through e-mail.

In June, Eubanks will travel to Alaska and the Arctic Circle with researchers as part of a program sponsored by the National Science Foundation. The St. Mark teacher was selected among scientists around the country to participate.

"I hope to e-mail my students while I am there," she said about her summer trip. "This is a wonderful opportunity."

Eubanks and her husband, Ron, love children and hope to have a couple of little scientists of their own in the future.

The Dwyer award program is now in its 24th year, and is co-sponsored by the Education Foundation of Palm Beach County and the Economic Council of Palm Beach County. More than 250 teachers competed for the award, and winners were selected by a committee for their creativity, high standards and community involvement. Each winner received \$3,000.

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