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St. Peter Educator Named Recipient of $15,000 Award for Excellence

Sean Keating, a teacher at St. Peter High School in St. Peter, was surprised April 15 with the news that he is a recipient of a 2021 WEM Outstanding Educator Award, an honor that is accompanied by a $15,000 award.

Keating is one of six educators being honored by the WEM Foundation and Synergy & Leadership Exchange for outstanding accomplishments and contributions to student learning. His recognition comes in the Athletic Coach category, which recognizes teachers who are exemplary coaches of athletic teams.

Sean Keating is a high school biology and chemistry teacher at St. Peter High School and also coaches boys’ basketball. Sean has been teaching and coaching for 11 years. Keating’s vision is to build character first and educate everyone that winning is short term, but character building is the long-term goal. He feels a focus on character traits is more important than wins, points, statistics, or any other transactional measurement. The most important trait of that being empathy. Keating believes if they teach kids to put themselves into other people's shoes, they will create compassionate, humble and servant leaders. One example of how they incorporate this goal, is to have students put phones away on bus rides and pair up with other players. The players are then given questions to ask each other or topics to dive deeper. All of this is calculated, planned and done with the purpose of helping players grow as people which in turn grows their team.

“You can really feel how much Coach Keating cares about his players by the way he interacts with us,” said a former player. “Conversations with Coach went beyond basketball, he cared about the person before the player. He always put an emphasis on being a team and being selfless which helped bring the team closer together.”

In addition to coaching and teaching, two years ago Keating started a club at the high school called the Mental Warriors. He saw that many high school kids were stressed out about school and the expectations that their parents and society put on them, so the vision for the club was to educate teenagers on the importance of their mindset to handle the stresses of life. Mental Warriors has now grown to more than 100 students and meets bi-weekly. These meetings give students time to express themselves, talk to other students and share their feelings within the community. It’s a safe space where people all share the common goal of growing together.

“His ability to operate as a coach and mentor simultaneously, while seeing each players’ individual strengths and weaknesses, allows for tremendous development and growth for each athlete,” shared a community member. “This focus translates into a strong, balanced and outstanding team. He isn’t just coaching basketball, he is building a team of responsible, resilient and ethical young men.”

In addition to the Athletic Coach Award, other educators are being honored with the Academic Challenge Coach Award (teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges), Ethics in Education Award (exemplary educators who embody ethical behavior and promote ethical development for students through classroom or school activities, policies or curriculum) and the Teacher Achievement Award (exemplary teachers who support, inspire, and assist students to attain greater learning as evidenced by student achievement).

Educators are first nominated for the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards program by students, parents, colleagues or community members. Those who accept the nomination provide additional information for consideration by Synergy & Leadership Exchange and a blue ribbon selection panel, which reviews and ranks the nominees. In addition to the six statewide honorees, additional educators have been selected as regional honorees for 2021. These names will be announced in May.

Synergy & Leadership Exchange is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering collaboration to advance the development of ethical citizens, providing educational resources, and celebrating achievement and best practices in Minnesota schools, businesses and communities. For more information on the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards Program and Synergy & Leadership Exchange, visit: [www.synergyexchange.org](http://www.synergyexchange.org).