

**Child safety efforts garner educator with honor during competition**

By Garret Felder; July 7, 2008

BENSON — While Northside Elementary teacher Kathy Ahrndt waits for her new classroom improvements, Benson School District administrators are excited about the future student benefits from her classroom makeover.

In June, Ahrndt was announced as a grand-prize winner of the Got 2B Safe! Contest, a national competition promoting child abduction prevention.

As part of the honor, Ahrndt's classroom will be given a \$10,000 makeover.

"It was kind of a real, nice surprise," said Superintendent Lee Westrum. "And Kathy is an outstanding teacher.

"You're always surprised when something like this happens ... but I'm not surprised they picked a lesson of hers. She does a real nice job for us."

Westrum said this isn't the first time a district teacher has won an award, citing recent winners of the Minnesota VFW Teacher of the Year and Minnesota Science Teacher of the Year awards. "But this is pretty rare," Westrum said. "This is definitely the biggest prize, obviously."

Ahrndt's \$10,000 classroom makeover is scheduled to begin this month and the improvements will be revealed on the first day of class in September. Ahrndt said she requested technological boosts to her room, such as a SMART Board, which is a touch-controlled, interactive whiteboard that hooks up to a computer and projector.

A professional designer for the contest will fashion the final plans of the classroom makeover.

Dennis Laumeyer, principal of Northside Elementary School in Benson, said Ahrndt asked him for some ideas about the classroom improvements.

Laumeyer said Ahrndt has been an asset to the elementary for 16 years because she "works to meet all student needs, uses a lot of different teaching strategies, and works very well with others by sharing ideas and sharing strategies."

Ahrndt's ability to integrate technology into her teaching has also made her very valuable to the elementary, Laumeyer said.

The makeover will benefit many students over the years, Laumeyer said, because Benson's third-grade students get rotated for different subjects among the elementary school's three third-grade teachers.

"We're just very proud of Mrs. Ahrndt for the recognition she is receiving," Westrum said. "She is an outstanding teacher and this will be great for our kids and her students."

**As number of missing kids in the nation rises, teacher's efforts timely**

By Garret Felder; July 7, 2008

BENSON — One of the worst places for parents to see their child's face is on a milk carton. But when more than 2,000 children in the U.S. are reported missing each day, how can parents teach their children about avoiding abduction and make the lessons stick?

Just ask third-grade teacher Kathy Ahrndt of Northside Elementary — she won a \$10,000 classroom makeover last month for teaching those lessons to her Benson students.

"In rural Minnesota, we tend to be distant from (child abduction) and yet it has happened here," Ahrndt said. "We've seen it happen in small-town Minnesota." Ahrndt said she became more aware of this national issue after entering the Got 2B Safe! Contest.

The contest is a national competition organized by Honeywell International Inc. and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

The annual competition, first organized in 2005, calls for elementary teachers to educate their students about child abduction prevention through creative lesson plans. The contest requires participants to incorporate the Got 2B Safe! Four Rules of Safety into their lesson plans.

Each year, teachers submit their lesson plans and contest officials choose five teachers of the hundreds of applicants for the grand prize: a \$10,000 classroom makeover. Ahrndt said she entered the contest because a colleague, third-grade teacher Julie Carroll of Northside Elementary, had won a \$500 gift certificate as a first-prize winner in the 2007 contest.

"Teachers are always looking for ways to get additional funds to buy things for their classrooms," said Ahrndt, a 16-year teacher at Northside Elementary. After entering the contest, Ahrndt said she watched seven days of the "Deal or No Deal" television show during holiday break before she had an idea for teaching child abduction prevention — she would create a "Deal or No Deal" game.

With her game, Ahrndt had 15 students hold construction paper briefcases, similar to the TV show, but with child safety scenarios written on them. After reading a scenario aloud, the students would decide whether the situation was a "deal" or "no deal."

Eventually, the students would find the "deal" briefcase with treats for the whole class behind it. Ahrndt said her students were very engaged with the activity and even played the game with first- and second-grade classrooms in the elementary.

"I think as educators, we find more and more that we teach a lot more than math and reading," Ahrndt said about teaching topics like child safety. "We're teaching a lot more of other things."

Once Ahrndt was announced as a grand-prize winner in June, she flew to Washington, D.C., to receive her award and see the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Ahrndt said the visit to the center was an "eye-opening experience."

"You realize a lot while you teach safety tips," Ahrndt said. "There are a lot of kids that get fooled by people, and they don't even realize it until it's too late."

"We care about our kids," Ahrndt said. "And we need to keep them safe."

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 797,500 children were reported missing in a recent 12-month period. The department estimates about 2,100 children are reported missing each day.