



Blaine elementary teacher receives national safety honor

By Tim Hennagir
May 2, 2007

Debbie Amenrud, a fifth-grade teacher at Johnsville Elementary School in Blaine, will be honored nationally next week for her dedication to child safety education.

Amenrud is one of five recently announced grand prize winners in the second annual Got 2B Safe! Awards sponsored by Honeywell and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

Amenrud, her husband, Brian, and Patrick Murray, Johnsville Elementary principal, will travel to Washington, D.C., and attend two days of events May 8 and May 9.

The trio will attend the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Hope Awards event Tuesday evening, where Amenrud will be recognized, and a congressional breakfast with Minnesota and other lawmakers the following morning.

The Annual Hope Awards are a black-tie awards ceremony that highlights individuals, businesses and organizations working together to make the world safer for children.

As a grand prize winner, Amenrud also will receive a free classroom makeover from a top New York area designer, Vanessa DeLeon.

The makeover, valued at \$10,000, is being scheduled for the first week in June and will be completed before school lets out, Amenrud said.

In 2003, Honeywell and National Center for Missing & Exploited Children created the Got 2B Safe! Program to arm teachers, parents and children with vital child safety skills.

According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, more than 2,000 American children are reported missing each day.

Twenty percent of girls and 10 percent of boys will be sexually abused before they reach adulthood.

The center receives more than 300 reports of Internet-related crimes against children daily, according to its Web site.

This year, the Got 2B Safe! program will honor 105 teachers from 33 states, including the five grand prize winners.

Teachers submitted a lesson plan or essay demonstrating how they taught four rules to keep children safe from abduction and sexual exploitation.

Amenrud's award-winning submission included a fun, easy to remember poem which she created with her students.

"This is the biggest thing that's ever happened to a Johnsville teacher," Murray said. "This is really huge."

Murray is nearing the end of his two-year term as president of the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association.

He will attend the Got 2B Safe! award event as a representative of that organization and as Johnsville's principal.

"He's likely to be the only principal in attendance at next week's Hope Awards," according to Amenrud.

Murray and Amenrud said the Got 2B Safe! award represents a collaborative effort, since they often work together to discuss and develop such classroom programs.

"It's very exciting," said Amenrud, referring to her award announcement and the trip to Washington, D.C.

"Being named a winner really didn't hit me until I saw my photo and the poem on the Got 2B Safe! Web site last week," Amenrud said, adding she will leave for the nation's capitol next Monday, May 7.

Watch for continuing coverage of Amenrud's award and her trip in later print editions of the Blaine-Spring Lake Park Life and online at www.abcnewspapers.com.

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National award brings Blaine teacher honor, new friendships

By Tim Hennagir
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Educators who visit Washington, D.C., often leave the city filled with inspiration.

Debbie Amenrud's recent two-day trip to the nation's capital also provided a number of once-in-a-lifetime experiences, but on a much larger scale.

Amenrud, a fifth-grade teacher at Johnsville Elementary School in Blaine, stood shoulder-to-shoulder with many of America's best-known child safety advocates.

She also was recognized in front of a large audience as one of five national grand prize winners in the Second Annual Got 2B Safe! Awards.

Teachers submitted a lesson plan or essay demonstrating how they taught four rules to keep children safe from abduction and sexual exploitation.

Amenrud's award-winning submission included a fun, easy to remember poem which she created with her students.

The awards are sponsored by Honeywell and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) based in Alexandria, Va.

Amenrud, her husband, Brian, and Patrick Murray, Johnsville Elementary principal, traveled to Washington, D.C., May 8 and May 9.

"Honeywell and the National Center treated us like royalty, when it was Queen Elizabeth who was the one in town," she said. "We were chauffeured back and forth to our hotel and had all of our airline flights arranged."

The trio attended the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Hope Awards banquet Tuesday evening at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Washington, D.C.

The following morning, they participated in a congressional breakfast and the Twelfth Annual National Missing and Exploited Children's Awards.

The trio met a number of celebrities, most notably John and Revé Walsh.

Their 6-year-old son, Adam, was tragically abducted and murdered July 27, 1981.

Today, most people know Walsh as the hard-driving host of "America's Most Wanted."

The family's tragedy led to the creation of the Adam Walsh Child Resource Center.

That center eventually merged with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which the couple co-founded in 1984.

Amenrud said the Hope Awards banquet was a red-carpet, black-tie event, that was second to none in class.

"It was very dignified," she said. "When you hear stories about abducted children who have been recovered and some who haven't, you feel very humbled to be a part of it."

Amenrud, her husband and Murray also met Richard Belzer, best known by television viewers as Detective John Munch on NBC's "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit."

The show received a special award for subject matter that dealt with abducted children.

A special visit to the NCMEC was another highlight mentioned by Amenrud.

"We were lucky enough to get a tour," she said. "They talked a lot about Internet safety. That is the big push right now, to keep kids safe when they use the computer."

The center tour also included a visit to a room used for age enhancement, facial reconstructions and photo imaging and identification, she said.

"They showed what a child abducted years ago would look like today. It takes them about a day-and-a-half to do. The technicians showed us an example of a young man and age-progressed him."

Every year the NCMEC honors law-enforcement officers who have demonstrated exceptional efforts in missing children recovery and combatting child sexual exploitation.

In addition, a very special award — the Courage Award — is presented to a child who has exhibited outstanding resilience and courage to pull through their own ordeal.

The awards were presented at the second major event attended by Amenrud, her husband and Murray.

"We felt very privileged to be there, too, because they honored a number of policemen who had helped to bring sexual predators to justice," she said. "It was a very emotional event to witness."

Amenrud said she wants to expand her efforts as an advocate for child safety programs.

She wants to share contacts and knowledge from her Washington trip in the community and throughout Anoka-Hennepin District 11, where she has taught 26 years.

"My work with the NCMEC is just beginning," she said. "I feel fortunate to have this opportunity. For me, it's all about kids. I really would love to see other teachers get involved with this program."

Amenrud's students had a special and warm welcome for her when she returned to school late last week.

"There were lots and lots of hugs all around," she said. "They were so excited. They loved all the pictures from Washington, and I gave each of them a souvenir key chain."

As a Got 2B Safe! grand prize winner, Amenrud also will receive a free classroom makeover from top New York designer Vanessa DeLeon.

The makeover, valued at \$10,000, is being scheduled for June and will be completed before the end of the year.