

Clarion Ledger- 10-8-00

### **Mississippi Teachers Rewarded With Cash Award**

During my 1<sup>st</sup> grade year I became very sick and had to miss a lot of school. Every Thursday my first grade teacher would stop by to review with my mother the work I had missed that week in school. She would spend every Thursday from 3:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. making sure we had everything we needed to get me caught up with lessons. It was because of her efforts that I passed 1<sup>st</sup> grade right on schedule with the rest of my class. I was fortunate to have a teacher that made an extra effort to see that I didn't miss any information I needed.

There are many teachers who are just like my 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher. Mississippi's students are fortunate to have outstanding, dedicated teachers who are committed to making a difference in the lives of each and every one of their students. Our teachers teach because they enjoy their jobs. They enjoy seeing the faces of their students when learn how to read, or understand how to figure out a math problem or find out about the invention of the telephone. They don't do their jobs for praise or recognition, they do their jobs because they love to teach.

In Mississippi and across our nation we are faced with the challenge of attracting people to enter the field of teaching. The challenge lies not just in the number of teachers needed, but in the quality of those teachers. The Milken Family Foundation recognizes that the need to attract more quality K-12 teachers is urgent, and as a part of the Foundation's response to this challenge, they developed the Milken National Educator Awards. The purpose of the Awards is to reward, retain and attract the highest caliber teachers to the teaching profession.

This past Wednesday we had the fun task of awarding three Mississippi educators with a trip to Los Angeles and a cash award of \$25,000 each. That's right, \$25,000 to spend in any way they wish. These three teachers were winners of the 2000 Milken Family Foundation Educator Awards. They join 147 other Milken Award winners from 41 other states.

We traveled to Kreole Elementary School in Moss Point, Hernando Elementary School in Hernando and the Mississippi School for the Deaf in Jackson with Dr. Richard Thompson, State Superintendent of Education and a representative of the Milken Foundation to make the surprise announcements.

Lowell Milken, Foundation Chairman and Co-Founder of the Awards says, "By choosing to practice in the most noble and important profession there is, and by doing it with such excellence, each Milken Educator is making a lasting contribution to young people's minds, imaginations and character." Mr. Milken is right.

None of the recipients knew they were being honored until their names were revealed before an assembly of students, fellow teachers and other officials. The expression on

their faces as their names were announced was priceless. After several hugs from their fellow teachers and students and a few tears, each teacher shared why they chose teaching as a profession.

The comments ranged from, “I love my job.” To “I can’t imagine doing anything else.” Each Milken Award winner Vivian Smith, of the Mississippi School for the Deaf in Jackson; Carol Burton of Hernando Elementary School in Hernando; and Sonja Boone of Kreole Elementary School in Moss Point; is deserving. Congratulations to these teachers, and every teacher across the State of Mississippi who makes our students lives better through their work.

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