



NJDOE News

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Somerset County Educator is 2000-01 Teacher of the Year

Barbara LaSaracina, a fifth grade teacher at the Woodland School in Warren Township, Somerset County, has been selected as the 2000-01 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year. Ellen Schechter, assistant commissioner for the Division of Academic and Career Standards, introduced LaSaracina at today's monthly meeting of the State Board of Education.

"The Teacher of the Year Program is designed to identify exemplary teachers throughout the state. Through a process which begins on the local level, we ultimately select one teacher to symbolize the highest standards in the profession," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "Barbara LaSaracina, our new Teacher of the Year, lives up to the ideals of the program, and in fact, goes well beyond them.

"Her family background and career in microcosm represent the journey of so many strong and ambitious people who came to this country with their dreams and their determination to succeed in life and make the world a better place," the Commissioner said. "I am particularly impressed with the influence that public education has had on her career.

"Barbara is a very apt and talented professional who is a worthy recipient of this honor," Hespe said.

"Barbara LaSaracina is a shining example of the type of high quality educators we want to keep and reward in our classrooms," said Governor Christie Whitman. "Her sense of idealism, dedication, and commitment to her students' success make her an asset to any school. I congratulate her on her selection as Teacher of the Year, and I look forward to meeting her."

The foundation of LaSaracina's family in the United States was laid by her great-grandmother, Christina Rose Cupo Casciano, who arrived in 1910 with her seven children. A vigorous proponent of learning and "doing good in the world," Christina and her husband sent their four daughters to Barnard College, from which they graduated and later became teachers; and their three sons to Columbia Medical School, from which they graduated and later became doctors.

Barbara, who describes her great-grandmother as a powerful inspiration in her life, graduated from college but did not immediately choose teaching as a career. She had a bachelor of science degree in bio-medical technology from Fairleigh Dickinson University, and had worked in a hospital for six years before she realized that she really wanted to work with children.

As a teacher candidate under the alternate route to certification, she accepted her first position in River Edge, Bergen County, where she worked for the first three years of her career. Her next assignment, teaching grades three, seven and eight in Watchung, lasted six years. She is now teaching in her second year in Warren Township.

LaSaracina said her reasons for teaching are multi-faceted and interwoven with each other. Here are excerpts from her application on why she chose teaching as a career: "I teach to give voice to those often left unheard...I teach to spark imaginations...I teach for probing questions that challenge the status quo. I teach to light a fire, not fill a pail...Being a teacher is far beyond a career to me, it is the essence of who I am for I see our nation's future in the eyes of my students. I teach to touch that future."

Although tradition is a strong influence in LaSaracina's life, so are the challenges of the future. "I see holding on to the old ways as the largest deterrent to educational excellence and as a major public education concern," she said. "Educators must stop seeing change as an adversary. We should accommodate it, align with it, use it."

LaSaracina, a resident of Warren Township, is a member of several professional organizations, including the New Jersey Education Association, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Phi Omega Epsilon Honor Society, the American Society of Clinical Pathologists, and the Warren Township Education Foundation, which she helped to establish.

Active in her community, LaSaracina volunteers her time as a scout leader, religious instructor and has developed

a program to teach young children to care for those less fortunate. In addition, she is co-writing a children's math book and has designed a line of clothing and accessories which will fund social problem-solving workshops and culturally diverse programs for schools.

As New Jersey Teacher of the Year, LaSaracina will be asked to be an advocate and role model for the teaching profession and will speak on behalf of the teachers of New Jersey. She will also represent New Jersey in the national Teacher of the Year competition, which is cosponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers and Scholastic, Inc. The national winner will be announced in April 2001.

The Department of Education will provide LaSaracina with a laptop computer and fax machine, and will reimburse her for her travel costs and her school district for the cost of her substitutes. At the request of the New Jersey Education Association, all Saturn retailers of New Jersey have unanimously agreed to provide a Saturn for Barbara's use.

A panel of judges representing the state's education associations selected LaSaracina. The panel reviewed the applications of the 21 county teachers of the year and interviewed five finalists before deciding on LaSaracina.

NOTE TO EDITORS AND REPORTERS: [Attached is a list of the 2000-01 County Teachers of the Year.](#)