

Olup-Young of Kenston is Rotary teacher of the year

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The Rotary Club of Chagrin Valley honored area teachers at their May 2 meeting. Pictured above, Jason Peterson (left) and Kenston Teacher of the Year, Stephanie Olup-Young.

Photo submitted by Bruce Corson

The Chagrin Valley Rotary Club has chosen Kenston Middle School math teacher Stephanie Olup-Young as its Kenston 2023 Teacher of the Year.

Mrs. Olup-Young has 23 years' teaching experience, with 18 years at Kenston. That experience includes teaching math, science, social studies and language arts in elementary, intermediate and middle school classrooms.

For the past two years, she has taught seventh- and eighth-grade math, including special education and gifted students.

Mrs. Olup-Young is also a member of the interview committee that hires incoming teachers, and has been a content leader for math, science and social studies.

She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from Ashland University and Master of Education in educational leadership from the University of Dayton.

“Stephanie’s goal is to connect with students and parents and to develop personal and professional relationships with students, staff and community members,” Rotary member Ralph Tuthill said in presenting Mrs. Olup-Young’s award at the club’s May 2 luncheon meeting. “Her natural ability to communicate information to parents and students effectively provides confidence and stability to the school-home relationship.”

Mrs. Olup-Young is also a trained design team leader. She introduced Accounting for Kids in Intermediate School, implemented a program for fifth grade called Math Money Madness, presenting the results to the Young Entrepreneur Institute. She received an award from Economics America for “Kids Investigating Success.”

Mrs. Olup-Young said that teaching is all about making connections, and that once connections are made with students and parents, anything is possible.

But everything that is happening in the world, including electronics, makes teaching a difficult position at this time, she said. In her classroom, she tries to make all of that disappear so students can focus on learning and “just being kids.”

Kenston Middle School Teacher of the Year runner-up was Jason Peterson, seventh-grade science teacher and head coach for almost a decade.

Mr. Peterson has 15 years of experience at Kenston teaching fourth-, seventh- and eighth-grade math and science. He spent three years teaching math and science at Plain Local Schools in Canton.

A member of Kenston Local Schools’ literacy committee, he designed work-study curriculum for the district and developed and taught the pre-engineering curriculum at Kenston Middle School in 2019 and 2020.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education from the University of Mount Union and a Master of Education degree in instructional technology from Valdosta State University.

For almost 10 years, Mr. Peterson has been head boys basketball and track coach, and assistant boys football coach.

“This caught my attention because that’s pretty much throughout the year,” Mr. Tuthill said. “I said, ‘How about your family?’ He assured us that he has the support of his wife and children. In fact, he has a young son that is looking forward to the day that he can be coached by his dad.”

During his interview, Mr. Peterson told the Rotarians that he enjoys coaching this age group in particular because they are beginning to develop the strength and coordination to succeed in sports. He strives to teach rules and correct technique early on, Mr. Tuthill said.

“Most importantly, he wants to ensure that they do their best. If they win, that’s wonderful. If they lose, they still did their best and they should be satisfied with that,” Mr. Tuthill said. “I think that’s a wonderful way of introducing children to sports.”

Mr. Tuthill said that Mr. Peterson is considered by others to be collaborative, dependable and hard-working while contributing to the growth of students and colleagues, both in the classroom and many areas outside of academics.

“All of those who work with Jason learn from his experience and expertise,” Mr. Tuthill said.

South Russell Village Mayor William Koons, who had a 39-year career in public education, said in opening remarks that teaching is not an easy job.

“You’re greatly rewarded through smiles, hugs and little trinket presents, but it’s great to know that you’re here, and we are happy to recognize you as teachers of the year for the Kenston and Chagrin Falls schools. Congratulations.”

Teachers in the Chagrin Falls and Kenston school districts are nominated for the Chagrin Valley Rotary Teacher of the Year award by their school principals. They submit resumes and are interviewed by a small group of Rotarians, who select a winner and runner-up from each school.

The Chagrin Falls Middle School winners will be highlighted in a future issue.