

UNsung HEROES

Celebrating Teachers Who Make The Grade

(NAPSA)—America's teachers are at the head of the class when it comes to helping children learn, grow and excel.

But as the Internet, video games, instant messaging and other distractions compete with educators for children's attention, many of today's top teachers have had to get creative to help keep students interested.

Unfortunately, budget constraints and a tough economy have led many of those teachers to dip into their own pockets to create captivating lesson plans. Now a unique program could help reward those efforts.

Since 1996, it has recognized kindergarten through 12th-grade educators for their innovative teaching methods, creative educational projects and ability to positively influence the children they teach. Called the ING Unsung Heroes® award, it's given more than \$3 million in grant money to support teachers across the U.S.

Each year, 100 finalists are selected to receive a \$2,000 grant, payable to both the winning teacher and his or her school. Of the 100 finalists, three are selected for additional financial awards: \$25,000 for first place, \$10,000 for second place, and \$5,000 for third place. The top winners are selected by ING's Educators Advisory Board, consisting of six distinguished educators from across the United States.

Smart Success

This year's first-prize winners are Leslie Kaplan, Richard Kurtz and Catherine Nolan, a team of high school educators who partnered with community businesses and other groups to create the "Real Problems/Real Solutions: Service Engineering Program."



A unique program helps reward the efforts of top teachers.

The initiative encourages students to apply their engineering knowledge to solve real problems for people with disabilities. Youngsters who participate first speak with a disabled individual to learn about specific physical and mental challenges he or she might encounter. Next, they interview professional engineers and teachers for advice and then draft designs for adaptations to existing devices that have proven to be difficult for disabled people to use.

By working directly with those who are differently abled, the students have the opportunity to apply their classroom studies to the real world.

Past years' winners have included a high school teacher as well as an elementary school teacher. Robert Ostmann, a high school teacher and 2008 winner, developed a program, "LifeWorks Studio," which has helped keep students in school. The student-operated small business contracts with parent groups at different schools to videotape plays, concerts and other events and to produce professional-quality DVDs for the schools to sell as fundraisers. The program's students have also partnered with a regional hospice organization to film and produce "LifeStory" video memoirs of men

and women nearing the end of their lives. Interacting across generations and with the community is meant to give students a unique perspective on the possibilities and challenges that life can throw their way.

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Elementary school teacher Jonathan Felix won in 2007 with his program, "Write On," integrating writing, English, photography, technology and Web design into the teaching curriculum. Felix's third-grade students use technology to research, write, edit and create a library of books that are then made available online as e-books. They learn how to use a digital camera, download and edit photographs, create and print pages, and publish and upload their books on the Internet.

How to Apply

Applications for the 2010 awards are now available at www.ing.com/us/unsungheroes. April 30, 2010, is the deadline for applying, and the contest is open to kindergarten through 12th-grade educators employed by an accredited school (additional eligibility requirements apply).

The nonessay portion of the application can be completed using a fillable PDF. Applicants need only download the PDF and type information directly into the file. The essay and budget sections of the application need to be completed in a separate Word document or other word-processing program. All application materials should be submitted following the process outlined in the application.