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PRESS RELEASE

First Online Teacher of the Year Selected

Last update: 11:25 a.m. EST Dec. 2, 2008

LANSING, Mich., Dec 02, 2008 /PRNewswire-USNewswire via COMTEX/ -- Online instructor Lorri MacDonald excels in the virtual classroom

This fall Lorri MacDonald has 40 high school students in her two Introduction to Forensic Science classes. She teaches another 17 in Advanced Forensic Science. Both are popular courses, think CSI with homework. But there is something else unique about MacDonald's classes and, specifically, her classroom.

MacDonald is an online instructor teaching in a virtual classroom. Her students are from schools all across Michigan, from tiny Detour Village in the Upper Peninsula to Grand Rapids to Ferndale just outside Detroit. The course content and instruction all happen over the Internet, with students logging in to follow lessons and complete assignments, and MacDonald interacting with students through e-mail and discussion rooms.

MacDonald excels in the virtual classroom. That is why she was chosen earlier this month as the first ever Online Teacher of the Year by Michigan Virtual School(TM), a division of Michigan Virtual University(R) (MVU(R)). Michigan Virtual School has trained more than 400 online instructors like MacDonald since it was launched eight years ago.

"Online instructors are a critical component to effective online teaching and learning," said Jamey Fitzpatrick, president and CEO of MVU. "Just like in face-to-face teaching, online instructors must be engaging, knowledgeable and available. Lorri is all of these things and more, and she represents the very best in what is a new and growing field. She truly believes all students can learn and does a remarkable job of developing rapport with students she never gets a chance to meet in person."

Online learning is expanding dramatically in Michigan and nationwide. Michigan Virtual School has seen its course enrollments climb from 100 during the 1999-2000 academic year to more than 12,000 during 2007-08. National estimates for online enrollments have jumped from 40,000 to 50,000 in 2000 to about 1 million last year, according to the North American Council for Online Learning.

MacDonald has seen the expansion of online learning first hand. She developed the MVS Forensic Science course three years ago and started with just a handful of students enrolling. Nowadays the classes are so full that two other online instructors are helping MacDonald teach the introductory course.

"It is an honor to be named Online Teacher of the Year," MacDonald said. "I am part of a talented and dedicated staff of teachers at Michigan Virtual School, to be recognized as Teacher of the Year is quite humbling."

Like most of the more than 100 Michigan Virtual School instructors, MacDonald teaches in the face-to-face environment as well as online. She is an assistant professor in Science Education Methods and Educational Research Methods at the [University of Detroit Mercy](#) and teaches for MVS on a part-time basis.

MacDonald, who earned her doctorate in education and master's degree from Eastern Michigan University after receiving her bachelor's degree from Western Michigan, also has more than 20 years of experience in teaching and building administration at the middle and high school levels. She started teaching online three years ago.

"Online learning has changed my teaching practice in my face-to-face classroom," MacDonald said. "I have become more creative and constructivist by encouraging students to build on their own prior knowledge rather than relying on 'pearls of wisdom' dropped during lectures.

"Online learning is much more than just 'sit and get,' which is a common misconception that I have encountered," she continued. "Online learning is the way of the future, the way to reach more students in remote places and more students with up-to-date information. If we don't use this form of learning, our students are deprived of learning the skills necessary to compete effectively with the rest of the world."

MacDonald was one of four finalists for the Online Teacher of the Year Award. The other finalists were Molly Bruzewski, an education consultant from Bay City who serves as an MVS online instructor in American Government, Legal Issues and Advanced Placement Government and Politics; Melanie Laber, a mathematics teacher at Hartland Middle School who teaches math online for MVS; and John Goudie, a biology teacher at the Kalamazoo Area Mathematics and Science Center who teaches Bioethics online for MVS.

"Online instructors are helping define the classrooms of the future," said Robert Currie, executive director of Michigan Virtual School. "Our online instructors use powerful

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communication and presentation tools to engage students in an online learning environment. Today's students turn to the Internet for everything from shopping to social networking. Online instructors reach out to students through a medium with which they are extremely comfortable."

According to a 2005 Pew Internet Project survey, 87 percent of kids between the ages of 12 and 17 use the Internet, and close to nine out of 10 of them believe the Internet helps teenagers do better in school.

"Lorri represents a growing number of elementary, middle and high school teachers in the U.S. that are honing their skills as online instructors," said Susan Patrick, president and CEO of the North American Council for Online Learning. "She is a true educational pioneer and is helping all of us reshape how educational services are delivered at the K-12 level."

MacDonald, along with the three other finalists, will be honored during an awards banquet in at the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center in Lansing today, Tuesday, Dec. 2. The event is being hosted by Michigan Virtual School and MVU. It will be attended by educational leaders from around the state.

About MVU

MVU is a private, nonprofit Michigan corporation established in 1998 to deliver online education and training opportunities to the citizens of Michigan. It is the parent organization of the Michigan Virtual School and Michigan LearnPort(R), an online learning portal that delivers professional development opportunities and more to the Michigan education community. To learn more, visit <http://www.mivu.org>

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