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WOMEN AT WORK ONLINE

Lorri MacDonald honored for her online forensic science coursework

BY PATRICIA MONTEMURRI • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • DECEMBER 14, 2008

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Lorri MacDonald, 52, has charted new paths in online instruction. She was selected this month as Michigan's first Online Teacher of the Year. From her personal computer at home in Dearborn or on a laptop from travels abroad, she teaches the foundations of forensic science -- fingerprinting, evidence collection, crime scene analysis -- to high school students from all over Michigan.

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The Award: It comes from Michigan Virtual School, a division of Michigan Virtual University, a Lansing-based nonprofit that has trained about 450 online K-12 teachers since its inception eight years ago.

The impact: Excellence in online teaching is valued more and more since Michigan became the first state in the country to require high school graduates, beginning with the Class of 2011, to take an online course or demonstrate online proficiency in other coursework.

Teaching time: "I do it from wherever I can. The bulk of it comes from my home in Dearborn. But have laptop will travel. This summer, I was teaching in China, and I was teaching my virtual classes from China also." Her students can access the class 24/7.

Her background: Lorri has taught middle and high school science classes, and adult education classes in Detroit, Dearborn and Melvindale. She's been an assistant principal and principal in the Westland schools. Besides her online teaching for Michigan Virtual School, she also teaches nurse educators in the classroom and online for the University of Detroit-Mercy.

How she got started: Lorri was an assistant principal in Westland trying to motivate a gifted student and lined him up with some new online coursework. Intrigued, she took instruction on becoming an online teacher. When she saw Michigan Virtual School needed an instructor in forensic science -- think the "CSI" television franchise -- she told supervisors: "I can do that. I was a medical technologist for six years and I know the science."

Study guide: Lorri built the online class in forensic science herself. Online, the students can perform virtual analyses with simulated testing of liquids, powders and evidence. Lorri has photographed



WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

Lorri MacDonald was recently named Online Teacher of the Year. "I love what I do," says MacDonald, of Dearborn. "I really push my students to join the 21st Century."

MICHIGAN VIRTUAL SCHOOL

- Michigan was the first state to have an online course requirement for high school graduation.
- About 100 students took online high school courses through Michigan Virtual School in 2000, its first year. Now 15,000 students are enrolled.
- Nationally, online K-12 learning has grown from about 50,000 to more than one million students. • Schools pay a fee to Michigan Virtual School to provide the online classes for free, in most cases, to students. For more info: www.mivu.org

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simulated crime scenes using her sister, Kathy MacDonald, as a victim, and her mother's living room as the scene of the murderous mayhem.

Her students: Some 63 students are enrolled in Lorri's Introduction to Forensic Science class and about 20 are in her advanced unit. They live throughout Michigan, from Detour in the UP to Grand Rapids to Ferndale.

Kudos: Students "leave her classroom better prepared in technology and using the Internet," says Kathy Bush, an associate dean at UD-Mercy. "But they also love themselves more and they love learning more. She deserves cult status in my book."

No skipping class: "I don't miss class," says Lorri. That means even if, for some reason, she can't be in her classroom at UD-Mercy, her students have access to prerecorded online instruction, where they hear her voice presenting the material.

At home: Lorri, who is single, lives with two rescued greyhound dogs. A former student she once mentored through a difficult home situation treats her like family. When he married recently, he asked Lorri to be his partner for the mother-son dance.

Tough teacher, top results: "Everyone says my classes are hard, but they're worth it," says Lorri. "I love what I do. I really push my students to join the 21st Century."

Contact **PATRICIA MONTEMURRI** at 313-223-4538 or pmontemurri@freepress.com.

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peegee wrote:

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