

ProStart Educator Excellence Award

Written by Marshall Ashcraft
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Watauga High School teacher Lee Ann Williams has been awarded the 2011 ProStart Educator Excellence Award from the North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association's Education Foundation (NCRLA). This honor, also known as the ProStart Educator of the Year award, is given annually to recognize an exceptional educator in the state who is using the ProStart curriculum in his or her classroom.

Lee Ann Williams, award winning teacher of award winning students at Watauga High School.

ProStart is a two year program that gives high school students intensive preparation in food preparation and restaurant management. Developed with the guidance of leaders in the restaurant industry, the ProStart curriculum offers students the chance to learn and practice the skills involved in creating appealing menus and running a successful business.

"Dedicated ProStart educators are working diligently to create that vital bridge between the industry and the classroom for their students," said NCRLA President and CEO Paul Stone. "Williams embodies all that makes ProStart educators successful – inspiration, leadership, collaboration – and is very deserving of this honor."

Marshall Gasperson, director of personnel and of career and technical education for the Watauga County Schools, said Williams is "a teacher who is always looking for ways to give her students opportunities that will prepare them for success after high school. She is an excellent educator who is very effective at helping students recognize and achieve their full potential."

In recognition of her award, Williams and 34 other top educators from across the country will be flown to Chicago to be hosted at the ProStart Educator Excellence Awards by the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation. The awards ceremony and special ProStart educational opportunities offered at the event will span three days in May.

Williams has taught for nine years at Watauga High School, where her students have won recognition in state and national ProStart competitions. Students from the high school won first place in the state in both the culinary and restaurant management ProStart competitions this year, and the team is headed to national competition in Kansas City April 29-May1. Williams said Watauga High School's team "set the standard for culinary and restaurant management" at this year's state competition and she is confident the team will also do very well in the national competition.

Williams says she enjoys teaching ProStart "because it is a very good curriculum reflecting the needs of the food service and hospitality industry. ProStart can be taught in a culinary program with a commercial kitchen or in a traditional Family and Consumer Sciences kitchen with equipment modifications. The curriculum is always evolving and we can change the units with current trends to keep students on top of the future career." Her advice for beginning ProStart teachers is to "Enjoy your students and the curriculum -- keep learning and growing with your students."

Williams currently lives in Trade, Tennessee with her husband Barry and enjoys the time she is able to spend with her daughter Shawna and granddaughter Anna Grace.

The ProStart program reaches 90,000 students nationwide and is supported by local and national members of the restaurant and foodservice industry, educators, state restaurant associations, and the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation. More information about the ProStart program is available at www.prostart.restaurant.org.