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Mackay Educator Named 2024 Idaho Teacher of the Year

Career Technical Education instructor Trent Van Leuven was presented with the award in a ceremony at Mackay Jr./Sr. High School on Wednesday

(BOISE) – Superintendent of Public Instruction Debbie Critchfield announced today that Mackay High School career technical education instructor Trent Van Leuven is the 2024 CapEd Credit Union Idaho Teacher of the Year. In addition to being Idaho’s nominee for National Teacher of the Year, Van Leuven received a commemorative plaque and a check for \$10,000.

The Idaho Teacher of the Year program, in partnership with CapEd Credit Union, highlights the best of the best in Idaho teaching talent. Selected by a blue ribbon panel from 69 nominees, Van Leuven will serve as spokesperson and representative for Idaho educators at a variety of local and national events throughout 2024.

“I’m thrilled we have someone so dedicated to his students and community to serve as our state’s Teacher of the Year in 2024,” said Critchfield. “Idaho is full of tremendous teaching talent and this year’s group of nominees was exceptional. That said, as the selection panel progressed through the evaluation process, it became apparent early on that they had a standout in Trent.”

Van Leuven started his teaching career as an agriscience instructor in the West Ada School District in 2009 before moving to Mackay Jr./Sr. High School in 2014. He is the president of the Mackay Education Association, chairman of the State and Federal Lands Committee of the Idaho Farm Bureau as well as secretary for the Idaho Agriculture Teachers Association. He was the 2014 recipient of the National NAAE Ideas Unlimited Winner award. He was also named National Agriscience Teacher of the Year from Region 1 in 2017.

Van Leuven is a graduate of the University of Idaho with a Bachelor’s of Science in Agricultural Education.

In his time at Mackay Jr./Sr. High School, Van Leuven has changed the landscape of career technical education, expanding opportunities for students to encounter real-world applications for their everyday learning both in the classroom and in the field.

U.S. Forest Service fish biologist Bart Gamett spoke of Van Leuven’s abilities to bring learning to life in his recommendation letter:

“Trent demonstrates leadership and innovation inside and outside of the classroom that helps students develop a pattern of lifelong learning,” Gamett said. “One of Trent’s most significant accomplishments is the construction of a new state-of-the-art aquaculture facility at Mackay High School. Prior to 2022, the aquaculture facility was housed in a small, retrofitted greenhouse.”

In an effort to open the new facility, Van Leuven approached donors for funding and recruited students, professionals and community members to provide volunteer labor.

“In November 2022, an open house was held and the new 1,400 square foot aquaculture facility began operating,” said Gamett. “This facility will give students the opportunity to work with fish long after Trent has retired.”

The aquaculture facility raises rainbow trout, sturgeon, tilapia and catfish, and provides fish for some of Idaho’s local waterways. When Van Lueven was approached by a student looking to raise golden trout, he was able to assist her in obtaining surplus trout fry from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game’s Mackay Fish Hatchery. The adult fish were then introduced to the Lower Cedar Creek near Mackay, where they now make up the first golden trout stream fishery in the state of Idaho.

Van Leuven also oversees the Mackay High School greenhouse program, including two large greenhouses that grow local produce alongside tropical fruits like bananas, papaya, passion fruit and pineapple. Students have the opportunity to sell the plants at local grocery stores or through a school store housed in one of the campus greenhouses.

“Trent’s students are getting the chance to not only get hands-on with growing and producing, they get to see the literal ‘fruits’ of their labor,” Critchfield says. “Whether they’re stocking streams or stocking produce shelves, they are getting a complete view of what their learning means to them and their communities.”

“Congratulations to Trent Van Leuven on this well-deserved recognition,” Governor Brad Little said. “I was so impressed with Trent when I met him earlier this year. He embodies all the qualities that make an outstanding teacher and mentor. Trent is making a real difference in the lives of our students. Trent, THANK YOU for what you do every single day to lead your students and set them on a path to success!”

Val Leuven is the first recipient of the award since Critchfield overhauled the Teacher of the Year program this summer. With the support of CapEd, the program has been revamped after few changes since the 1990s.

“I’ve been looking forward to this year’s Teacher of the Year event since my team began work on updating the program,” said Critchfield. “I’d like to thank CapEd Credit Union for their willingness to help us to honor the best in Idaho teaching talent. This partnership modernizes our state program and ensures that Idaho teachers know they are celebrated and appreciated.”

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Attached: Photos of the 2024 Idaho Teacher of the Year Trent Van Leuven