

NHHS teacher is Canada's music teacher of the year



By Tony Pearson

Bancroft can now lay further claim to musical excellence.

Dianne Winmill of North Hastings High School has been proclaimed MusicCounts Teacher of the Year. MusiCounts is a division of the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (the people who hand out the JUNO awards). It was established about a decade ago to "recognize the hard work and dedication of music teachers in keeping music education available to young Canadians." No one who has been exposed to the music program at NHHS would be surprised at this award. Lucille Kyle, chair of the Hastings-Prince Edward District School Board and trustee for the Bancroft area, summed up this feeling: "I was not surprised when I received a call that Dianne won this amazing reward. Dianne's infectious personality, her talent and her energy makes a room come alive as the sounds of music burst into the air. Her heart for our students, love for music, and her passion for teaching brings success to our students at NHHS."

NHHS principal Ken Dostaler amplified this sentiment. "Mrs. Winmill works tirelessly to promote music education not only in our school, but throughout the North Hastings community. Dianne continues to integrate creative programming options for students, such as Royal Conservatory of Music exams. The NHHS band has also performed for all feeder schools and various community groups and functions for numerous years. We could not be more proud of her," he said.

Winmill, who was totally surprised by the award, said that the process started with an effort to gain funding for new band instruments. As the initiative gathered steam, she was overwhelmed by the letters of support from current and former students, parents and members of the Bancroft community.

The award will help the high school. One of the prizes is a \$10,000 grant to the NHHS music program. According to Winmill, this will allow the school to fix existing instruments, and buy some new ones.

"As the students advance their skills with every semester, both in class and by challenging themselves with our Royal Conservatory of Music examination program they begin to outgrow our aging and beginner-level fleet of band instruments," said Winmill. "Our gruelling pre-holiday tours and public concerts can often take a toll. This money is coming at just the right time."

Winmill herself will receive a \$10,000 grant. In addition, she and her family will go to Toronto for a concert by the renowned Canadian country rock group Blue Rodeo, who are the sponsors of this year's teacher award. (Previous sponsors have included the Tragically Hip, Celine Dion, Rush -? and for the first award, the Rolling Stones). NHHS music students will get time in Blue Rodeo's music studio. Finally, Dianne and her husband Cam, who also teaches at NHHS, will attend the JUNO awards.

Winmill doesn't see it so much as a personal honour as much as a recognition of the hard work put in by past and current NHHS music students, as well as the broader importance of music within the school curriculum.

"I know personally how involvement in music changes lives," she asserted, noting that she would be performing that evening with her original piano instructor and her first music teacher, to whom she owed her career. "That's why at the core of this application were heart-felt feelings about the importance of music programs [for] our students." She also saluted Troy Thrower and Rod Moffitt for maintaining a feeder music program at York River Public School, when many elementary schools don't even have a music teacher. "This award puts Bancroft music students on the national map," she said.

Finally, she thanked MusiCounts for ?believing in the necessity of an award such as this one. There are so many elementary and secondary school music teachers across this country who work just as hard or harder than I do. I feel like I am representing all of them when I accept this amazing honour.?