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FLAS wins outstanding agriculture program award

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Community Editor

The Forest Lake Area School District has had a long history of award-winning agriculture programs, and that tradition continued recently when the Forest Lake agriculture program won the 2018 Outstanding Middle School/High School Program from the Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators. Agriculture teachers and FFA advisers Mike Miron, Ann Tauzell, and Veronica Ward accepted the award at the association's annual banquet on July 11.

"It's a huge honor to have three people that have worked so hard and dedicated so much time to be honored for the work they do for kids. It says that we're on the right track and we're doing the right things," Forest Lake Area High School Principal Jim Caldwell said.

All three teachers have grown up in the Forest Lake schools and are now working with students from middle schools and the high school in the agriculture department.

"We all came from this system. We were all supported by the school district here, we all got jobs here, we were all members of the agriculture department when we were students. ... And so for us, it was very significant that we were able to carry on a tradition that's been passed down through a number of other staff members and other generations to students and continue that legacy of having a strong agriculture program in the school district," Miron said.

The award is one of three schools can apply for, each specifically designated by what grades the program is submitting. Miron said the process begins with a regional meeting at which a school is elected in the region to submit an ap-

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The new greenhouse at the Forest Lake High School has opened students up to new endeavors in agriculture.

Submitted photos

Award

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plication. Forest Lake was selected to represent its region. Miron said the district's strongest case was looking at the district as a whole, instead of just focusing on the high school specifically. The selection process looks at the different elements of a program and the involvement in the community.

"It's about marketing, it's about partnerships, it's about the school curriculum and student organizations, which in our case is FFA, and experiential learning," Miron said.

One of the strongest parts of the program,

Caldwell said, is the integrated learning for both matching core subject requirements and the coordination with the University of Minnesota to allow students to take courses for college credit.

"And along with that, they do a nice job of realizing that core subjects are really important, and they create courses that meet standards in core areas. Again, filling that gap for kids, so they're taking classes they're interested in, but yet getting those core experiences," Caldwell said. "The biggest thing that's most noteworthy is their work with concurrent enrollment with the University of Minnesota. It brings that

learning that they're getting to life and it honors those kids for doing hard work, and you're earning that college credit. In the past, those ag kids didn't have those opportunities, and now in Forest Lake they do have those opportunities ... and I think that's important."

And it's all about the students, according to Miron.

"We have a great group of students that we work with. ... They're as much a part of this success as the staff are, so any of our current students, any of the students that we've had, they're the ones who really care about what happens in the agriculture department and their

efforts allow us to implement the things that we're able to do," Miron said.

The recent new construction has helped strengthen the program, as well. According to Miron, the new greenhouse facility is a huge draw, and updates in technology have helped the students see where the future of farming will be.

"We've had greenhouse classes and things going on in the greenhouse since before I've been here. But that new facility, all the sudden students would wander down and say 'What's growing?' and 'What do you have going on?' It really created a focal point. I also think we now have the facilities

and the ability to show students what modern agriculture looks like because we're in a setting that looks like that. It's not a criticism of where we were, but when you receive that upgrade, I think that students have a different perception of what opportunities there might be in agriculture," Miron said.

Miron believes talking about the changes to agriculture economy is important for his students to learn about the different areas they might fit best, whether that be in food production, more of the technical or scientific side to farming, or in landscaping.

"We try to help students see this is not simply an elective you can take because it's a spot in your schedule. ... What we're doing here directly translates to a postsecondary transcript and you can continue your studies and get a job in these areas," Miron said.

The award was last won by Forest Lake in 1998, 20 years ago, and Miron wants the program to keep up with the industry and help the community.

"A lot of things have changed in 20 years and to say we've been able to maintain that level of excellence through that amount of time meant a

lot to the three of us. Especially knowing what we received from the program, in hope our students are receiving the same quality of experiences we had the opportunity to participate in," he said.

"We are purposefully integrated with the community. We try to meet the demands of what's happening here in our local area, so whether it's job demands or tech demands, we try to tweak the curriculum to meet the population of the students we're trying to serve," he added.

"Not only are they involved in the community, but they're intimately involved in FLHS and our courses and offerings, which I believe (are) unique to most high schools," Caldwell said. "It's really easy to put agriculture and FFA over in the corner, and (say that) that's the course you take if you're that kind of a guy. They really pull all kids into their department because they're intertwined."

Winning the award on a regional platform, that the school, people competing for their ideas award on a regional platform. That award that a series of be held in San Antonio.

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