

GOOD SHEPHERD TEACHER NAMED '2022 EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR'

MARY SIEJAK DESCRIBED AS KIND, GENTLE, AND CARING TEACHER

KINGSTON – One minute, Mary Siejak is helping a group of students learn to say colors in Spanish. The next, the Good Shepherd Academy educator is across the room helping others cut-and-paste the words of the Hail Mary onto a piece of paper.

Siejak's classroom is a constant source of activity and empowerment – and there is nothing that she would change.

On Nov. 15, 2022, Siejak's hard work and dedication paid off as Wilkes University named her its '2022 Educator of the Year.' The award celebrates excellence by a caring and ethical educator who has dedication to all students in his/her learning community.

"It was a complete surprise," Siejak said upon learning she won the award.

After working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Siejak admitted she is honored by the designation.

"For someone to say, what you did and what you're doing is really great and we'd like to celebrate you and the children and your school community, that really does mean a lot," she explained.

For the last seven years, Siejak has been an Individualized Instruction teacher at Good Shepherd Academy. She excels at helping students with exceptionalities become the best person they can be and to exposing them to life outside a special education classroom.

"They are the reason why I get up in the morning. If it wasn't for them, I don't know where I would be. They have changed my life so much," Siejak said. "Their journey may not be a typical one but they can still accomplish their goals, they can still be active, engaged participants, not only in a school community but society at large."

Siejak is a product of the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System itself, having attended Pope John Paul II School in Nanticoke. She was also part of the first graduating class of Holy Redeemer High School. Siejak says she fell in love with special education after helping a friend's daughter who was visually impaired.

"Mary is the best of the best. There are a lot of moving parts in the Individualized



Mary Siejak, right, works with students in her Individualized Instruction classroom at Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston on Oct. 28, 2022. Siejak has been named '2022 Educator of the Year' by Wilkes University. (Photo/Eric Deabill)

Instruction classroom," Jim Jones, Good Shepherd Academy principal, said. "We are blessed with these children that God has entrusted to us. Their parents believe in us and we have an obligation to teach them in the Catholic faith."

After observing Siejak in her classroom for only a few minutes, Jones says her love for her students becomes clear.

"She doesn't stop from the minute she walks in until the minute she leaves," Jones added. "She eats with her children. She doesn't take any breaks. She is in specials with them. Wherever they are, she is there and that is nice to know. It's a comfort for families to know their children are not only safe but entrusted with teachers who love them."

Jennie Kopka started last year as an aide in Siejak's Individualized Instruction classroom.

"She is kind and gentle and safe. I think all the children feel safe with Ms. S. and know that she always has their best interests in mind," Kopka said.

Directly outside the door of her Individualized Instruction classroom, Good Shepherd Academy has a bulletin board highlighting how Miss Siejak makes a difference every day. While describing her tremendous talent, strength and grace, the words of her extraordinary students speak the loudest.

"Miss S. is fun and takes us outside to get fresh air," one student wrote.

"She's beautiful, lovely, and very kind," another said.

"Miss S. is awesome, what more could I say," a third wrote.

As she celebrates receiving the '2022 Educator of the Year' award from Wilkes University, Siejak says it is those words that truly matter.

"You can't help but get emotional because they speak the truth, especially students of this population. They wear their heart on their sleeve, so to hear that, coming from them about me, tells me that I'm doing something right and I need to continue to do that for them because it makes them better people," she said.



At the school's All Saints Day Mass, fourth graders at Saint Nicholas/Saint Mary School in Wilkes-Barre portrayed saints they researched in preparation for this special day.

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The Diocese of Scranton is committed to educating our students in an environment that is academically excellent and facilitates the development of moral judgment and Christian decision-making. We are proud to share the following successes of our students in the classroom and in their service to others. Each day, our schools are fulfilling their mission of preparing today's youth and young adults to become tomorrow's faith-filled leaders.

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, recently celebrated Mass with students from three more Diocesan schools over the last several weeks. As he visits each school this academic year, the bishop is sharing stories about his summer trip to Ghana. One important message he has conveyed to students is based on a question Bishop Matthew of the Diocese of Sunyani asked a second grader at a school in Ghana. "What have you learned about God?" Bishop Matthew asked. The student - enthusiastic and very curious - quickly said that God loves everyone and we must return that gift by loving others.



Holy Cross High School in Dunmore



La Salle Academy in Jessup



Saint John Neumann Elementary School and High School in Williamsport



Sixth grade students at **Saint Agnes School in Towanda** are making soups and cookie jars to sell at the school's holiday gift gala where a percentage of the proceeds is donated to the Make-A-Wish Foundation.



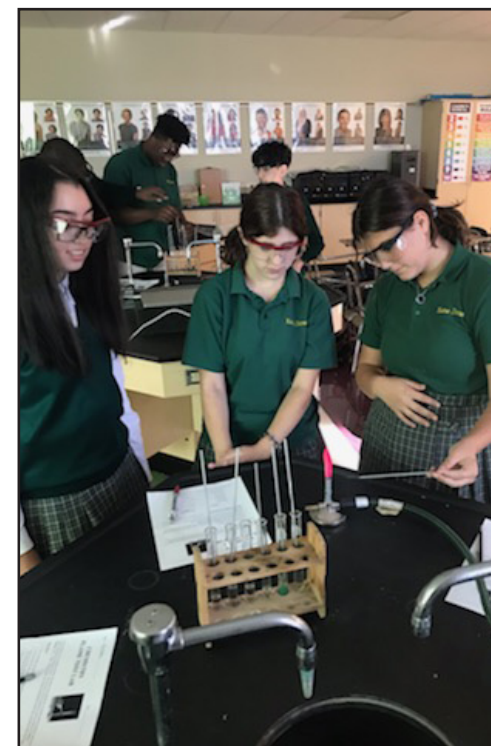
Students from **Saint Jude School in Mountain Top** have fun at the school's Trunk or Treat event.



Moderators and members of the Legion of Mary, an extra-curricular club, prepare for upcoming activities at **Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton**.



As a very special treat, the kindergarten students at **All Saints Academy in Scranton** were visited by a T-Rex, played by Father Cyril Edwards, V.E., pastor of Mary, Mother of God Parish, and Chaplain of Holy Cross High School.



In chemistry class, students at **Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg** explored how various elements produced different colors of light when heat was applied.



The Royal Family, comprised of students, faculty, administrators and staff, were ready to welcome interested seventh & eighth graders and their families at their annual fall open house at **Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre.**



Students utilized their STREAM lessons to create Haunted Houses at **Holy Rosary School in Duryea.**



Third grade students at **Epiphany School in Sayre** recorded cereal box book report commercials using their PadCaster.



During a Fire Prevention Week visit, firefighters from the Dunmore Fire Department pose with the second and third grade classes at **Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore.**



Twins? A pre-kindergarten student and Mr. Tom Kostic, principal of **Holy Family Academy in Hazleton**, dress alike during the school's Halloween festivities.



Members of the National Junior Honor Society at **Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green** sort and pack toiletry kits to be shipped to Florida to aid victims of Hurricane Ian.



Author Cheryl Benner visited **Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg** to read her kindness-themed book, "Wolves Aren't Welcome," and to explain her writing process to the older students.

Students from **Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter** recently participated in both the Forensics Regional Competition held at Holy Redeemer High School and the Forensics Final Competition held at Holy Cross High School. Sixth grader Grace Klein and seventh graders Molly Pokrinchak and Martha Goffredo placed in either the Regional Competition or the Final Competition.

