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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Renowned Idaho STEM teachers earn INDEEDS awards

BOISE, Idaho (Nov. 3, 2022) — Idaho STEM Action Center has honored two educators who champion science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and connect students with industry leaders to mentor projects and provide invaluable career guidance. A panel of industry experts selected Caldwell teacher Kristy Rudan and Rathdrum teacher Jessica LaPresta to receive the 2022 Industry's Excellent Educators Dedicated to STEM awards, or INDEEDS for short.

"Inspiring students to enjoy and engage in STEM is fundamental to maximizing our children's career opportunities and supporting Idaho's long-term economy," Idaho Gov. Brad Little said. "Thank you to these outstanding educators for training today's students for future jobs and teaching them to embrace innovation, problem-solving, and critical thinking."

The accolades were announced during the Idaho Technology Council Hall of Fame gala Wednesday night.

Rudan, the winner in the kindergarten through sixth-grade category, teaches sixth-grade science and English language arts at Syringa Middle School in Caldwell, plus she hosts an after-school 3D printing club and stages 3D printing summer camps. This is her second year at Syringa and her 14th year teaching. Rudan began her career teaching at a small Oregon charter school that focuses on technology integration and then taught fourth and fifth grade at Sacajawea Elementary School in Caldwell.

Possessing an endorsement in English for Speakers of Other Languages with specialized training in mathematics, Kristy is passionate about bringing unique, language-rich, hands-on educational opportunities to underserved populations.

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"So many careers are STEM related, and for kids to be exposed to that at a young age and to develop the critical thinking skills that go along with STEM learning opens a lot of career opportunities for them," Rudan said. "A lot of those careers don't even exist yet, so it's really exciting to teach them the skills they'll need to move into the future. And the most exciting part is knowing there are a lot of kids from diverse backgrounds who are having the opportunity to learn 3D printing and the engineering and design process. It's neat that diversity is being acknowledged and there are a lot of teachers who are bringing STEM into their classrooms for students of all abilities and all languages and all backgrounds."

LaPresta, the INDEEDS Awards winner in the seventh- through 12th-grade category, concurs.

"Our students need to be able to think on their own and strategize through problems when they get out in the real world," LaPresta said. "So when I get questions like, 'When will I ever use this,' I honestly tell them they may never use something like factoring trinomials in the real world, but the ability to think on your own is so important. You're building this personal knowledge to take it to a higher degree, so I think the content they're learning and the foundational pieces they're building through the years is all helping them become better citizens in any job that they have — to be more successful, to be better thinkers and learners and community members later on. STEM education is important because it enables our students to be productive citizens in our communities."

LaPresta chairs the North Idaho STEM Charter Academy's math department, and this is her eighth year teaching mathematics, including dual-credit college algebra and analytic trigonometry, at the Rathdrum school. She also teaches business technology, financial literacy, and senior project, and she serves on the faculty of North Idaho College as a math instructor. Prior to teaching, LaPresta worked for the Department of Defense performing operations research analysis, computer programming, probability, and statistics.

Incoming STEM Action Center executive director Caty Solace said both teachers integrate industry interaction into their lesson plans to ensure students develop the knowledge and skillsets Idaho employers need.

"Connecting real-world applications to learning experiences helps students understand the importance of what they are learning," Solace said. "Kristy and Jessica are exceptional educators who recognize and do this on a regular basis by being mindful of the need to bring their communities and industry into their classrooms. And their enthusiasm and passion for STEM are inspiring."

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Both educators will receive checks for $2,000 and up to $2,000 more to attend any STEM-related national conference, plus their schools will receive $2,000 each to fund science, technology, engineering, and math initiatives. Idaho STEM Action Center, Vynyl, Battelle Energy Alliance, the Micron Foundation, the Discovery Center of Idaho, Idaho Power, and Trailhead are providing the prize package.

Solace said STEM, including digital literacy, can help Idaho families thrive and succeed.

"STEM learning helps students develop creative thinking, problem solving, innovation, and collaboration skills," she said. "These durable skills are in high demand by Idaho employers that want to solve problems in our communities and beyond."

She said STEM jobs in Idaho are projected to grow 15.4 percent by 2030, outpacing the national average of STEM job growth at 10 percent, and that 90 percent of jobs will require digital literacy within a decade.

According to Solace, STEM jobs are interesting and rewarding and include careers in healthcare, engineering, software development, finance, agriculture, and construction. She said STEM jobs pay nearly twice as much as non-STEM jobs.

About Idaho STEM Action Center
Idaho STEM Action Center was created in 2015 because Idaho citizens are not entering the STEM pipeline fast enough to meet current and future Idaho workforce needs. Its goals are to increase equitable access to STEM opportunities, align education and workforce needs, and amplify awareness of STEM throughout Idaho. The organization is working with industry, government, educators, and students to develop new resources and support high-quality professional-development opportunities to foster a STEM-educated workforce that ensures Idaho's continued economic prosperity.

Visit STEM.idaho.gov for more information, and visit https://STEM.idaho.gov/support-us/foundation to make a tax-deductible donation to the Idaho STEM Action Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, to enhance the investment the state has made in Idaho's STEM community. Contributions provide greater access to STEM camps for children, student competitions, and many other life-shaping programs.

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