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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Outstanding Idaho STEM teachers earn Sawtooth Awards

BOISE, Idaho (Nov. 15, 2022) — Idaho STEM Action Center has honored two educators who champion science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and integrate real-world experiences and hands-on activities into the classroom. A panel of industry experts selected teachers Misti Newby and Chad Maxton to receive the 2023 Sawtooth STEM Educator Awards, formerly known as INDEEDS Awards.

“These educators represent the dedication and innovation needed to prepare students and our communities for the challenges of the future,” Idaho Gov. Brad Little said. “Thank you to these outstanding educators for inspiring them to embrace innovation, collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking.”

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

Newby, the winner in the kindergarten through sixth-grade category, teaches science and STEM in grades 1-8 at Grace Joint School District. She also serves as the Eastern Idaho school district’s girls wrestling coach along with her husband, James, who coaches the boys team. This is her sixth year at Black Canyon Elementary School in Grace and her 19th year teaching, including stints in Wyoming, Montana, and Alaska.

She is passionate about harnessing the transformative power of hands-on problem solving and project-based learning. As the only female science teacher in the district, Newby serves as an important role model for girls interested in science and STEM, according to her colleagues.

“Kids have to know how to be learners and problem solvers,” she said, “I can’t teach them what I don’t know, so I teach them to be learners and ask questions and to answer their own questions.

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“My favorite part is seeing the aha moments. There are lots of challenges and frustration, but just having that independence and ownership of their learning provides for bigger celebration after bigger struggles and challenges, too.”

Maxton, the Sawtooth Awards winner in the seventh- through 12th-grade category, concurs.

“STEM is a great thing because it engages the whole mind of the child,” he said. “They have to problem solve, they have to use math, they have to use facts to really make things work. It's not just a matter of taking a guess at it and not caring about it. If they really want to be successful, they have to keep trying and trying and trying.

“STEM education is critical, because if we don't develop this kind of mindset in kids — even if they don't go into a STEM field — I don't think they'll be able to tackle things and deal with the adversity that's out there. It's really beneficial for them, even if they're not going to be an engineer, to learn the engineering design process of always going back and fixing the problems and improving on what works.”

Renowned throughout the Caldwell School District for his tireless efforts to expand STEM opportunities, Maxton teaches math, social studies, and pre-engineering to students in grades 6-8 at Syringa Middle School. He has served as a teacher for 32 years, spending all of them in Caldwell.

STEM Action Center executive director Caty Solace said both teachers integrate real-world experiences, hands-on activities, and 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. “Misti and Chad 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.”

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, the Micron Foundation, Idaho National Laboratory, Technology Credit Union, Idaho Power, and IBL Events are providing the prize package.

Solace said STEM, including digital literacy, can help Idaho families and communities 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 is an education and growth catalyst helping educators, businesses, families, and communities prepare the workforce of tomorrow. An incubator, connector, and advocate of STEM thinking and initiatives, the agency provides resources, support, and problem solving that spark innovation and offer paths to prosperity based on Idahoans’ shared values of hard work, collaboration, self-determination, family, and community stability. Learn more at stem.idaho.gov and visit stem.idaho.gov/support-us/foundation to make a tax-deductible donation to its 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation 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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