



CONTACT:

Angela Hemingway, 208-332-1726, angela.hemingway@stem.idaho.gov

Tony Harrison, 208-880-9814, tony@COMMposition.biz

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Renowned rural Idaho science teachers earn INDEEDS awards

BOISE, Idaho (Oct. 24, 2019) — The Idaho STEM Action Center has honored two rural 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 Cocolalla librarian and technology teacher Lynette Leonard and Emmett science teacher Robin Wilson to receive the 2019 Industry’s Excellent Educators Dedicated to STEM awards, or INDEEDS for short, which the Idaho Technology Council presented at its Hall of Fame and Idaho Innovation Awards Gala last night.

“The STEM skills that students learn today will prepare them for the careers they will start a decade or more from now,” Idaho Gov. Brad Little said. “We congratulate and thank these award-winning educators for bringing lifelong knowledge in science, technology, engineering, art, and math to rural Idaho.”

Leonard, who has instructed children in formal and informal settings for 15 years, is a passionate advocate of STEAM education, which incorporates the arts into science, technology, engineering, and math instruction. She believes every student should have the same access to learning opportunities regardless of geographical location, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity — a major motivating factor in her quest to bring STEM and STEAM resources to the students at her small, rural school. Leonard has created a makerspace in the Southside Elementary library, started a 3D printing team, hosted STEAM career nights and STEAM summer camps, and is working diligently to create the first STEAM SmartLab in Idaho.

“So many of our jobs require STEM skills,” Leonard said. “If we don’t provide that foundation to get students started at a young age and help them build skills and become interested in STEM, they won’t have the opportunity to be competitive and reach out and explore all the options that are available to them.”

Meanwhile, Wilson seeks to hone her students’ analytical skills so they become better decision makers as adults regardless of whether they pursue STEM careers.

“STEM education helps students with their critical thinking, so it’s very important even if they’re not on the pathway to becoming a scientist or a medical professional,” Wilson said. “They still need to make decisions in their life about their health, understand political and environmental positions that they will vote on, and how they view their own natural world. It’s also important students don’t compartmentalize what they’re learning between math and science so they can use the different sciences together with math to explain what’s happening in their surroundings and environment.”

Wilson worked for 15 years as a professional biologist before earning a master's degree in teaching and transitioning to a high school science teacher in 2014. She works tirelessly to advance the science program in the Emmett School District, which appointed her science department chair in 2018. A student of hers earned a Best of Fair Award at the third annual Western Idaho Science & Engineering Fair in March, plus Emmett High School brought home the Top School Award. In May, Wilson was one of 60 U.S. educators the Society for Science & the Public named as advocates to mentor underserved students and help them navigate science research competitions.

Dr. Angela Hemingway, executive director of the STEM Action Center, said both teachers also integrate industry interaction into their lesson plans to ensure students develop the knowledge and skillsets Idaho employers need.

“Lynette and Robin are exceptional educators who recognize the importance of industry interactions,” she said. “Both are very mindful of the need to bring their communities and industry into their classrooms, as well as the importance of getting their students outside the traditional classroom. They’re constantly connecting students with real-world opportunities that are relevant and community based.”

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. The STEM Action Center, Idaho National Laboratory, Vynyl, Micron Foundation, Discovery Center of Idaho, Idaho Power, Trailhead, and Idaho Technology Council are providing the prize package.

Former Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne created the INDEEDS awards in 2000. The Micron Foundation, Idaho National Laboratory, HP, LCF Enterprises, Idaho Power, and AECOM — formerly URS/Washington Group — sponsored the effort, initially called the Governor’s Industry Award for Notable Teaching in Science (GIANTS). In 2013, former Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter incorporated the award presentation into ITC’s Idaho Innovation Awards, and in 2015 he assigned the program to the STEM Action Center, which renamed it INDEEDS to emphasize the important role industry plays in fostering a well-educated workforce.

Dr. Hemingway said STEM knowledge and skills are important to the future of Idaho, because they’re needed for critical and creative thinking, problem solving, innovation, and collaboration.

“Idaho is the fastest-growing state in the U.S., our tech sector is the second fastest growing in the nation, and 80 percent of all jobs will require technology skills within the next 15 years,” she said. “Meanwhile, Idaho’s unfilled STEM jobs leaped from 3,800 in 2016 to 6,300 in 2018, which represents nearly \$413 million in lost personal wages and more than \$22 million in lost state tax receipts. The Idaho Department of Labor predicts upwards of 100,000 STEM jobs will exist in Idaho by 2024. These jobs will represent \$6.5 billion in personal income and almost \$350 million in tax revenue if our workforce is poised to fill them.”

She said there currently are nearly 7,800 unfilled STEM jobs in Idaho and that all of Idaho's top-10 hot jobs require STEM skills: Registered nurses, software developers, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, information security analysts, industrial machinery mechanics, market research analysts, pharmacists, physical therapists, and loan officers.

The Education Commission of the States anticipates robust job growth in Idaho STEM careers by 2027: 19 percent in computing, 11 percent in engineering and 24 percent in advanced manufacturing, including 3D printing and design.

About the Idaho STEM Action Center

The 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 coordinate and facilitate implementation of STEM programs, align education and workforce needs, and increase 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.

###