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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Renowned Idaho science teachers earn INDEEDS awards

BOISE, Idaho (Oct. 29, 2020) — The 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 Galileo STEM Academy teacher Gina Kwid and Orofino Junior-Senior High School teacher Tim Gering to receive the 2020 Industry's Excellent Educators Dedicated to STEM awards, or INDEEDS for short.

“STEM education is a critical part of ensuring the next generation of Idaho citizens is equipped with the skills Idaho businesses need in their workers,” Idaho Gov. Brad Little said. “Congratulations to these two outstanding teachers for leading in the area of STEM education and preparing our students so well for lifelong learning.”

The accolades were announced online during the Idaho Technology Council Hall of Fame & Resilience Showcase Tuesday night. Visit <https://youtu.be/2TyKor-c9sk> to watch the STEM Action Center's awards presentation video that streamed live during the virtual event.

Kwid, the winner in the kindergarten through sixth-grade category, is the elementary engineering teacher at Galileo STEM Academy in Eagle. She has taught second grade, third grade, and engineering in the West Ada School District for 15 years and is a passionate advocate of early STEM learning.

“In the STEM classroom we get kids to think,” Kwid said. “They become problem solvers. They become self-sufficient. I love watching the light bulbs go on when they use the engineering design process to work through a problem and they discover the answers for themselves. And in elementary school, they are so creative. They're not constricted at this age about thinking about what they can and cannot do. For instance, our girls don't ever think they're not supposed to be doing STEM because they're *always* doing STEM.”

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

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“To see these kids as they tackle those problems and have to rethink and redesign and rebuild, to see their whole demeanor and the smiles and the laughter when they succeed, there’s nothing else like that in the teaching world in my opinion,” Gering said. “You’re not doing it — the kids are doing it. They’re learning, they’re understanding, they’re overcoming the problems that they’re facing.

“And what we’re doing directly relates to jobs that these kids can get either after a degree or trade school or even going right into the workforce. For instance, we’re working with drones, and there are so many jobs even in a rural area for drone operation — with the Forest Service, in farming, entertainment, hunting, fishing, and all those types of things.”

Gering teaches physical science and STEM at Orofino Junior-Senior High School and is the science department chair. He has taught chemistry, Earth science, and physical science for two decades. He also served as principal at Bonners Ferry High School from 2013-2016.

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

“Gina and Tim are exceptional educators who recognize the importance of providing industry interactions to their students,” 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, Vynyl, Battelle Energy Alliance, the Micron Foundation, Syringa Networks, Sparklight, the Discover Center of Idaho, Trailhead, and the Idaho Technology Council are providing the prize package.

Dr. Hemingway said STEM, including digital literacy, is crucial to Idaho’s continued prosperity.

“It is anticipated that by 2030, 80 percent of all jobs will require technology skills,” Dr. Hemingway said. “In fact, in education circles, coding is increasingly being referred to as ‘the fourth R’ — reading, writing, arithmetic, and algorithms — because computers and technology are such an integral part of everyday life.

“Meanwhile, Idaho’s tech sector is one of the fastest growing in the nation. It’s predicted to grow by 26 percent from 2014 to 2024 compared to just 8.8 percent nationally, yet many of our employers struggle to fill STEM jobs today.”

She said the number of Idaho's unfilled STEM jobs continues to climb, doubling from 3,813 in 2016 — the first year the STEM Action Center tracked it — to 7,633 in 2019.

According to the Idaho Department of Labor, nearly all of Idaho's top-20 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, loan officers, respiratory therapists, health care social workers, industrial engineers, occupational therapists, management analysts, accountants and auditors, diagnostic medical sonographers, cost estimators, and radiologic technologists.

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 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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