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Teachers in Casper and Cheyenne Awarded Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching

CHEYENNE – Kim Parfitt of Cheyenne and Gene Smith of Casper have been named the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching, netting them each a \$500 cash prize from the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE), the only state department of education to reward its honorees with a financial award.

Parfitt and Smith were honored at a reception last month in Casper.

"We are so proud of the work these teachers do. They are dedicated to their students, to improving education in their schools, and to mentoring others," said WDE Supervisor of Standards and Early Childhood Education, Laurie Hernandez.

The Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching is the highest recognition that a K-12 mathematics or science teacher can receive in the United States. Enacted by Congress in 1983, this program authorizes the President to present 108 awards each year. Each year, up to six finalists in each state are chosen for the Presidential Award through a rigorous peer review process, administered by the state coordinator for the award.

The applications of state winners are forwarded to the National Science Foundation where the final selection for the national Presidential Awardee is made. In the spring of 2014, the White House will announce the national Presidential Awardees for 2013.

Kim Parfitt is a national board certified teacher at Cheyenne Central High School where she teaches Advanced Placement (AP) biology and Honors biology. Parfitt has been a teacher for 11 years and has previously been named an Arch Coal Teacher of the Year (one of 10 in Wyoming for the year 2006). Parfitt has led the Central High Science Olympiad Team to three state titles and was the team lead for the first NASA Explorer School in Wyoming. Parfitt has also raised over \$30,000 in grants for science equipment, field trips and books for her classroom and been awarded a Fund for Teacher Grant to study wildlife in South Africa. Additionally Parfitt participated with the University of Wyoming's Center for Biodiversity on a three-year inquiry into the genetics of aspen groves in the Medicine Bow National Forest.

"We are very proud of Mrs. Parfitt and the exemplary teaching that she represents," said Laramie County School District 1 Superintendent Dr. Mark Stock. "This award helps bring attention and support to fine teachers in Laramie County School District 1 and throughout Wyoming."

Gene Smith is no stranger to teaching honors and awards, having been named the Natrona County Excellence in Education Award winner five times. He has also been named the Wyoming Geology Teacher of The Year in 2010 and the Citizen Award for the Presentation of Cedar Ridge. The Seward, Alaska native holds a BA in Archaeology, Geography, and Sociology from Adams State; a BA in Secondary Education from Wyoming; and a MA in Technology Education from Lesley University. He has continued his education through field science courses through the Wyoming Cowboy Coalition Grant.

Smith taught seventh and ninth grade advanced and regular science, world geography, and US History for 25 years. Currently, Smith teaches seventh grade advanced and regular earth science courses at Dean Morgan Junior High in Casper. He has also coached girls basketball, volleyball and boys basketball for 17 years. He is currently the geography club sponsor and coordinates the school's National Geography Bee. He has had one student win the state bee.

"His students and professional colleagues have described Mr. Smith as an exceptional teacher," said Walt Wilcox, principal at Dean Morgan Junior High. "Year-after-year he has played a major role in helping his students build and construct mental and physical models that anchor their learning while discovering a love for science. He facilitates learning by actively involving students in the learning process through countless hands-on learning activities that promote student inquiry and active engagement. All of this happens as

students are being held to high expectations while motivating them to continuously grow and learn.”

For more information on the Presidential Teacher of the Year Award, contact Laurie Hernandez at 307-777-3469 or laurie.hernandez@wyo.gov.