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## CCMS educator honored for volunteer work

*(by Adam Greenberg-staff writer - March 12, 2009)*



**Theresa Evans revitalized school grounds**

CLIFTON – When Middle School literacy coach and 20-year Clifton-resident Theresa Evans decided to make the reconstruction of the Christopher Columbus Middle School (CCMS) campus her prerogative, she had no intentions of getting anything back. However, on Thursday, March 12, she received a big thank you.

Evans was scheduled to be honored at the annual Clean Communities award ceremony at Clifton High School yesterday. She was set to receive the prestigious gold Presidential Volunteer Service Award from the United States Department of the Interior's Take Pride in America Program.

"Last week I received a phone call and was told I won," said Evans. "I was very shocked, but also very happy."

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M	I	N	E	V	E	R	A	N	E	L	L
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Evans began her journey small.

"In the fall of 2006, we constructed the raised triangular flower bed on the traffic triangle," she said. "Jim Sonzogni helped construct the bed.

"Simultaneously, work was underway in the courtyard to transform an unsightly nook into a peaceful Diversity Garden."

As the seasons changed, the nature evolved and people took notice. Before long, Evans decided to continue renovating the more unpleasant areas of campus.

"Since the spring of 2008, barren and eroded sections of our campus have been transformed into an outdoor learning environment; a memorial rose garden surrounded by a manicured, park-like setting," Evans said.

Evans said the progress gives her great pride, but insists on thanking the volunteers who really helped these simple ideas blossom to fruition.

"These major landscaping projects were made possible through a great deal of community support via donations – monetary and supplies – and free labor through (Passaic County) Sheriff Jerry Speziale's Labor Assistance Program.

"Additional assistance from CCMS staff members Bede Klein, Dominick D'Andrea and Ted Melnick is greatly appreciated," she said.

Evans said even her husband Michael and her four children, Kristin, Katie, Emily and Michael helped out, saying much of her inspiration comes from her eldest daughter, 20-year-old Kristin. She was born with a skin disease that has not been easy to live with.

"[Kristin] has been a huge driving force for me," said Evans. "I want to do it for her. It's hard. I have to keep busy and getting stuff done makes me happy."

Additionally, Evans said she did this "to inspire a love of reading. I truly think reading will solve world problems. Providing a "natural retreat" for students and staff to quietly reflect and absorb nature's beauty is a key to academic success."

The future for Evans includes maintaining the grounds. She said, "I always have ideas, but I am still not done with what I started. For one, kids like to skateboard on the school premises and they always end up destroying things. One small shrub we planted must have gotten clearly in their way, so they just ripped it out and threw it off to the side.

"But no matter what they do, I'll be there to fix it," she said.

According to the official Web site, "The President's Volunteer Service Award is issued by the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation on behalf of the President of the United States to recognize the best in American spirit, and to encourage all Americans to improve their communities through volunteer service, and civic participation."

There are four different levels of award. The Bronze, Silver and Gold awards are earned by serving various hour requirements, depending on age, over a 12-month period. The Lifetime award has no time requirement and is always given for a minimum of 4,000 hours served, regardless of age.

In order to be eligible for the award, the volunteer must keep track of his or her hours and submit them to a certified organization. These organizations can be nonprofits, businesses, schools, colleges, membership and trade associations and federal, state or local government agencies, according to the Web site.

For Evans, Take Pride in America will be presenting her a gold award for nearly 1,000 hours of community service.

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"Her tracked hours were sent to us," said Lisa Young, acting executive director of Take Pride in America. "As a certified organization, we have the authority to administer the award."

Regarding her efforts, Evans said, "My hope is that the spirit of "going green" continues as a concentrated effort between city and district maintenance departments, custodial staffs, community businesses and environmental clubs at other schools."

About 750 residents were expected to attend the event at CHS and 69 organizations were set to be recognized along with Evans, said Clean Communities coordinator Al DuBois.

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