

Superintendent of the year says award is ‘about all of us’

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Teahons chose Gothenburg as destination.

Mike and Kelli Teahon traveled to Gothenburg months before Mike was hired as school superintendent in 2001.

The couple had identified seven Nebraska communities as good places to raise their four children.

“Gothenburg was at the top of our list,” explained Dr. Teahon.

On their visit, they were impressed that a bond issue to build a new high school had passed, on a 2 to 1 vote, and that the town was so clean and its people so friendly.

Also high on their list was the fact that the high school sweethearts, and their children, would be close to family in Custer County.

“And people talked positively about the school and the community,” Teahon said.

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Teahon has shared that school and community pride and enthusasium with residents for the past 12 years and it likely factored into his selection as superintendent of the year last Friday.

The Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association gave Teahon the award during the organization’s spring conference in Kearney Friday.

The 50-year-old was quick to note that the award isn’t just about him but about the students, staff and community.

“We have a great student body, school board, staff and community,” he said.

What makes him tick as a superintendent is a desire for the district to be as excellent as possible.

“Kids have only one chance and we need to help them take advantage of that chance and set the stage for them to do whatever they do in life,” Teahon said. “We do everything we can to make sure all kids reach their potential.”



That desire goes hand in hand with a philosophy he adopted that was shared by a mentor.

“He told me that a school system gets better or falls back,” Teahon said. “If it’s not improving, then others will pass you.”

Teahon strives to stay in the forefront, focusing especially on effective instructional practices and the use of data in driving decision making.

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"That's been the biggest change in the district," he said, noting that technology is a tool in the instructional model.

His doctoral dissertation, entitled "The Perceptions of Nebraska Administrators Regarding The Transition From STARS To NsEA And Its Perceived Influence On The Implementation Of A Balanced Assessment System," fits right into the use of data and effective teaching.

NsEA is a state-developed test while STARS were local assessments that measured student performance.

Teahon thinks Nebraska schools need a balanced testing system such as NsEA, MAPS assessments (a measure of student's progress or growth in school) and classroom-based testing.

"The challenge is tying these into the constraints of time, money and teacher time," he explained.

Early dismissal of students monthly is used for teachers to examine test data, align the information for improvements and collaborate with each other.

"The staff is dedicated and understands the importance of looking at and doing what's best for kids," Teahon said.

Interestingly, the Arnold High School graduate began his first year at Kearney State College majoring in architecture before switching to math and history education with endorsements in coaching and computer science.

"I found out I couldn't draw," Teahon said with a laugh about changing majors.

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SCHOOL BOARD COMMENTS

District 20 school board members nominated Dr. Mike Teahon for the superintendent of the year award. Some of them commented on Teahon and his award:

Jeremy Stenius: "Teahon is truly dedicated to Gothenburg Public Schools student achievement and promotes a positive learning environment for all students but he is quick to point out that our success comes from a great staff."

Asher Barge: "It couldn't go to a more deserving superintendent. We have known for years the great job that Mike does for our school and community and

anything we can do to get him some recognition (beyond the board) is important."

Scott France: "The award speaks to the respect the superintendents have for Teahon."

Board member Nate Wyatt said about Teahon's recognition for something that Gothenburg has known for a long time: "Teahon is a leader and an innovator."

Lisa Gohsen: "Teahon is an incredible asset to Gothenburg Public Schools with his strong leadership, dedication to improving educational quality, ability to build effective staff relations and his commitment to public involvement in education."

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