

Inspiration with a Side of Humor: PEI's 2023 FieldSTEM Celebration

by Heidi Smith



Chehalis Elementary School Teachers Jordan and Cori Jo Duncan; South Whidbey Elementary School teacher Andi Kopit and Principal Susie Richards ; Rep. Kristine Reeves and friends

FieldSTEM Teacher of the Year Jordan Duncan opened his acceptance speech at the 2023 FieldSTEM Celebration by reeling off a formidable set of credentials and awards. “If you think that’s an impressive resume, you’re right,” he told the amused crowd. “But it’s not mine; it’s my wife’s.”

Like his wife Cori Jo, Duncan is a teacher at Orin C. Smith Elementary School in Chehalis. He is also a wildland firefighter and his students have had several unusual experiences as a result. “Apparently you’re supposed to check before you land a helicopter on school grounds,” he noted.



Duncan’s speech capped a celebratory night of honoring FieldSTEM awardees from around Washington State. School of the Year South Whidbey Elementary Principal Susie Richards talked about the critical need for funding to support outdoor-based learning and the importance of involving the next generation in environmental education.

“It’s heartening to see so many young people here tonight,” she shared.



PEI's Megan Rivard, Superintendent Dr. Tracey Edou, Cascade School District Board member Trey Ising, and Peshastin-Dryden Elementary School Principal Emily Ross

District of the Year Cascade School District Superintendent Tracey Edou drew applause during a short video about the work happening at different grade levels to integrate outdoor learning. "We're not where I want to be yet," Edou said. "We're on the pathway, but I have ideas."

Legislator of the Year Kristine Reeves (D-Federal Way) took a selfie with the crowd during her award acceptance and posted, 'Spending my "Family Friday Night" with the Pacific Education Institute #FieldSTEM 'family' celebrating their work on connecting our kids to science literacy in the outdoors...in the field!'

'Honored to be chosen their Legislator of the Year as we work to advance equitable access to [#stemeducation](#) in the 6th most diverse school district in our country ([Federal Way Public Schools](#)) and across our state.'

During a pause while her video was uploading, Becca Kedenburg of Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust (MTSGT) gamely began interacting with the audience before sharing information about the organization's internship program and its impact.



PEI's Heather Spalding and MTSGT's Becca Kedenburg

PEI recognized MTSGT as Community Collaborator of the Year for its work with high school students in the Youth Engaged in Sustainable Systems (YESS) program. Legacy award honoree Nancy Skerritt highlighted several programs from her years as one of the first educators to adapt and adopt FieldSTEM while also contributing to its development.

For the first time, the event included a silent auction with items ranging from handcrafted art and museum tickets to a 'Beef and Beer' tour for ten in Ellensburg. Anyone in the room could bid but the auction was entirely online, meaning that bidders didn't have to be present to win. The auction brought in nearly \$3,000 toward PEI programs.

Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA) President Tim Garchow emceed the celebration, which included opportunities for guests to interact and two activity stations.

"It was a magical evening of celebrating both FieldSTEM and the amazing people who make it come to life for students," says Garchow. "Perhaps the biggest thing that people took away from the celebration was the fact that so many adults are pulling together to make great opportunities happen all across the state."



Washington State School Directors Association President Tim Garchow emceed the event.



Legacy Award winner Nancy Skerritt



Rep. Kristine Reeves with PEI's Nora Burnes and Kathryn Kurtz