



Staten Island Advance

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Wagner College honors 8 top educators

By DIANE C. LORE

Wagner College honored eight outstanding teachers and administrators with its Distinguished Educator Award during a ceremony and reception Wednesday on the Grymes Hill campus.

Honored were Melissa Morris, a music teacher at the College of Staten Island High School for International Studies; Pamela Washington, a Wagner alumnus who is a teacher at PS 14, Stapleton; Susan Shepherd, an assistant principal of St. John Villa Academy, Arrochar; Amanda Cortese, a Wagner alum who is assistant academic director of New World Preparatory Charter School, Port Richmond; Wagner College professor Danielle Arena, and Samantha Siegel, a Wagner graduate and community educator.

Wagner President Richard Guarasci presented the Hank Murphy Award to Evelyn Finn, principal of Lavelle Preparatory Charter School, Bloomfield. Murphy, for whom the award is named, is a Wagner graduate who served as principal of PS 11, Dongan Hills, from 1986 to 2001.

Additionally Guarasci presented the Wagner Compass Award for “extraordinary leadership in education” to Dr. Stephen Preskill, who recently retired from Wagner as a professor of education.

The award, an engraved silver compass, is symbolic of how Preskill guided countless students on their journey to become educators.

Education Department faculty members stepped forward to pay tribute to Preskill by reflecting on his career and his impact on students and the Wagner community.

The awards are sponsored by New Educators at Wagner, a post-graduate teacher development program that fosters learning among early-career educators. NEW was created six years ago by Carin Guarasi, a longtime educator and wife of Richard Guarasci, Wagner’s president since 2002.

“When we came to Staten Island, Richard and I didn’t feel there was enough recognition for teachers,” Mrs. Guarasci explained, adding that she knows from experience how challenging the work can be inside a successful school.

“It’s not easy being a teacher or principal today,” she said. Good teachers “devote their lives to this difficult job as a personal mission.”

Award recipients are chosen by a committee from among a pool of nominees, who must be either a Wagner graduate, or an educator who lives and works on Staten Island, and who has five or more years of experience as a K-12 teacher or principal; be an educator whose reach extends beyond the school walls, and who inspires youths to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others. The college sought nominations from the public during March and began reviewing candidates in April.