

The Oregonian

Winning teacher helped Tigard create program

Learning - Stevie Viaene is named the 2006 Oregon Technology Educator of Year

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Stevie Viaene, a technology teacher at Tigard High School, directs her students to sit as their "companies," the small groups they formed in their computer programming class. Before they turn to their screens to continue creating a video game that will appeal to girls, Viaene talks about project timelines. Although students might think of deadlines as set arbitrarily by teachers, Viaene explains that companies must meet them when competing to get games into stores in time for the holiday buying season.

Making connections to the real-world marketplace is just one of Viaene's strengths that have brought her recognition at the school and beyond.

The Software Association of Oregon Foundation has named Viaene its 2006 Oregon Technology Educator of Year. Kathryn Schwartz, the foundation's educational programs coordinator, said Viaene's many accomplishments include her work developing a Web-based curriculum for the foundation's teacher professional development program.

Viaene helped form Tigard High's Technology Department three years ago and is an assertive advocate for technology education, Tigard's principal, Pam Henslee, said.

Viaene teaches classes in computer programming, Web design and tech support. As the technology department coordinator, she also trains students to care for the 500 computers in the school's 15 minilabs and full labs. When Tigard High couldn't offer robotics as a class, she offered to run it as an after-school program.

She works closely with the school's systems administrator, Aaron Leininger, putting in hours beyond the standard work day brainstorming with him on how to fix problems, Leininger said.

Although it's important for students to become proficient at word processing, spreadsheets and technical presentations, Viaene also wants them to develop the knowledge and skills to go deeper. That can lead to all kinds of professions, she tells them, including video production and automotive repair.

Some of the classes she teaches have an algebra prerequisite, to show that students can understand variables and handle math logic and abstract concepts. But a student doesn't have to be a stereotypical brainy nerd to do well in her classes, she said.

Viaene strives to figure out what will appeal to 14- and 15-year-olds. "Then they'll work twice as hard" coming up with their own features or twists on a project.

After becoming a teacher 35 years ago, she began incorporating technology into her math classes. In 1972, the first computer in her Eugene classroom was a dumb terminal, with programs punched onto paper tape.

Viaene asked for another computer to use in a class for struggling students, and at first got the brush off from administrators. "I remember they said, 'Oh, those remedial students can't do that.' I said, 'Oh, would you like to come to my class and see what they're already doing?' "

She had taught her students to use BASIC A, an old programming language that directed the computer to print out a pattern -- nothing fancy, a series of X's and O's, but a way to make theoretical concepts fun.

"It's all learning to think," she said.

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