

# Local resident earns PM award

## Kim Speer recognized for work with Kindergarten students

By **EAMONN MAHER**  
Staff Writer

Georgetown resident Kim Speer was recently recognized by Prime Minister Stephen Harper for her educational efforts with Kindergarten students at an Oakville independent school.

Speer, 43, received the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence in Early Childhood Education along with nine other teachers from across Canada at a ceremony earlier this month in Ottawa.

Speer, a Dunnville native, was nominated for the award by her colleagues at the Oakville Academy for the Arts, where she's the director of its Kinderschool program.

Hired by the academy six years ago to establish its Junior and Senior Kindergarten programs from scratch, Speer's philosophy on learning is a "concentric circles" approach using the theme of Special Me, in which family and the community are partners in the child's education.

"We're all teachers and experts in our own domain, even my four-year-old students, who are experts about themselves and their own lives," said Speer, who plans to eventually open an arts-based school in Georgetown.

"We start with the child first and we speak to what they know and when you have children buying into the education, their community is going to facilitate even greater learning. Every four- and five-year-old is proud of their home and what street they live on and where they go to play, so if you focus on what they're experts on, maybe at the end of SK they've progressed because they've traveled a bit."



Georgetown resident Kim Speer poses with Prime Minister Stephen Harper after a ceremony in which the PM honoured 10 educators from across Canada with Teaching Excellence in Early Childhood Education awards. Speer is the director of the Kinderschool program at Oakville Academy of the Arts.

*Submitted photo*

Speer shares with the students "Little Kim" modern-day morality tales about a certain grown-up who could be somewhat mischievous at times in real life. A Celebration Calendar also goes home with each student so that they can record meaningful dates of special meaning.

As well as receiving the PM's award, Speer took part in an educational brainstorming conference called Best Practices with the other recipients that was recorded by a professional writer, who will in turn produce a document called Teaching to the Power of Ten. Each award winner made a 12-minute presentation about the uniqueness of their respective school settings and why they were selected from the

more than 300 nominees for the honour.

"It was a fascinating experience to hear someone from the Yukon talk about what they perceived as trends in their area and what the trends were in Quebec or Ontario, then meld those together and come up with top-10 lists that were fairly representative of the nation. It was a privilege and a really neat task, but it was hard work, too."

Almost as difficult was the nomination process with rigid guidelines for the candidates to meet, consisting of a 40-page document that included endorsement letters from parents, the kindergartners and fellow teachers.

"Knowing that people were willing to go to those lengths on my behalf was a gift in and of itself," Speer said.

"It's like a gift to me that I'll keep forever."

Although she did get to speak briefly with Harper at a special pin presentation, the award was officially presented the next day by Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Peter Van Loan, as the PM was called away for other duties.

There was another reception hosted by Harper's wife Lauren at the Prime Minister's residence to which the recipients were able to bring a guest, with Speer choosing her nine-year-old daughter Libby, the only youngster out of the award guests to attend.

"Libby's a Grade 5 student doing her civics project right now, so it was perfect timing," she added.

"To be there with her at a stage in her development when she has this unbridled enthusiasm and an understanding of the tradition of 24 Sussex, and that she's meeting the wife of the head of our government, it was a great thrill to see it through her eyes."

Certificates of Excellence come with a gift of \$5,000, to be shared by the teacher and school, along with the pin and a letter from the prime minister.

## Tooth Chatter



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By **Cory Soal**  
R.H.A.D.

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