

Teacher of Year inspired by astronaut

By Jay Meisel

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY —

As a child, Cristina Veresan grew up in New Hampshire, not far from where Christa McAuliffe, the first teacher to ride on a space flight, taught.

"She really inspired me with her passion and her courage and her ultimate sacrifice," she said. "Her legacy lives on."

Ms. Veresan, a science teacher at Southport Middle School, was named Teacher of the Year last week at the St. Lucie County School District's "Night of the Stars."

Normally held at Lincoln Park Academy, the event was moved to Fort Pierce Central High School because of construction of a new middle school at Lincoln Park.

Others who received



Southport Middle School teacher Cristina Veresan credited her administration and her students for making her this year's Teacher of the Year during the annual 'Night of the Stars' celebration of St. Lucie County teachers held Saturday, Feb. 26 at Fort Pierce Central High School.

Mitch Kloorfain
chief photographer

awards were:

- Colleen Lynn Morrissey, St. Lucie West Centennial High, Outstanding First Year Teacher

- Betty Lacayo, White City Elementary School, distinguished minority

educator

- Holly L. Soles, student services, school-related Employee of the Year

Ms. Veresan said she hopes to win the state Teacher of the Year award, which is named after Ms.

McAuliffe, who died in the space shuttle Challenger disaster on Jan. 28, 1986.

She said when thinking about the Oscars, which aired Feb. 27, she felt they should have an Oscar

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award for teaching.

"They do and they have it in St. Lucie County," she said.

Ms. Veresan said she has a supporting role. "My students take the leading role," she said.

She said she decided to become a science teacher because it involves a logical process at looking at the world. It also integrates mathematics, reading and writing, which allows students to gain a variety of

skills, she added.

Ms. Veresan said she also enjoys giving students real-life experiences in science, as opposed to them learning exclusively in the classroom.

For past four years, she has taken her students on field trips to the Savannas Preserve, where they learn science through real-time contact with the outside environment.

She has been involved with the school's science fair and has worked at the district level, helping work on the science curriculum.

Ms. Soles, who also will compete for state recogni-

tion, has worked for 22 years in the St. Lucie County School District at a number of schools and the central office.

She's been a reading aide and has been involved with parent education and professional development programs.

Now working at the front desk, she assists families with navigating their way in the education system.

Among others, she works with migrant and homeless families. She's also involved with the truancy and virtual school programs.