

OCT - 8 2011

Allen's P. C. B. Est. 1888

EDUCATION

350  
Honoring  
devotion  
to their  
students

Alameda County's  
Teacher of the Year  
winners take a bow

By Rob Dennis

rdennis@bayareanews.com

SAN LEANDRO — Tom Collett is a former football player and coach who uses his passion for magic to complement his students' science lessons at Newark Junior High.

Karen McMahon taught in New York for eight years and then worked in human resources for an additional 15 before returning to teaching at Horizon Continuation High School in Pleasanton.



McMahon  
Teaches  
at-risk teen  
parents in  
Pleasanton.

They come from disparate backgrounds, but now have something in common: an Alameda County Teacher of the Year award.

They were honored along with 19 other nominees from around the county Thursday night in a ceremony at San Leandro High's Arts Education Center.

The two winners were kept secret until the ceremony, and both Collett and McMahon said they were surprised and honored to have been



Collett  
Coach began  
Newark  
outreach  
programs.

"I'm just blown away," said McMahon, who works for the Tri-Valley Regional Occupational Program teaching at-risk teen parents at Horizon. "There were just so many wonderful representatives here from teaching and the education community, and I'm just very honored and proud to represent Alameda County."

Collett, who played and later coached football at Kennedy High in Fremont, taught for 17 years at Newark Memorial High, where he created two outreach programs training students in astronomy and marine science and coached the school's rocketry teams to the national finals. He is in his second year at Newark Junior High.

"I love seeing the light bulb go off, you know, the 'aha' moment," Collett said. "That's what fires me up, and I'm just always trying to get that out of all of my students."

The teachers thanked their colleagues and families during their acceptance speeches.

For McMahon, it all started with her mom.

"My mom always taught us that we needed to think of ways to give back to people and that you needed to believe in people," she said.

See AWARDS, Page 4

## Awards

Continued from Page 3

"She stressed with each of us that we needed to invest in ourselves and believe in ourselves and then give back to the community."

With a couple decades of teaching under their belts, Collett and McMahon could be forgiven if they got a little jaded.

But they both say their students make that impos-

sible.

"It's helping them discover who they are and to believe in themselves, and to know that they are important, they do count and to go out and be as successful as they can be," McMahon said.

For Collett, it's a little like football.

"As a football coach you can never become burned out because you're always trying to win, and for me, I kind of approach teaching the same sort of way. It's

like winning when I'm able to reach students."

Superior Court Judge Trina Thompson was the emcee at Thursday night's event, which included videos of the nominees in the classroom and discussing their teaching methods and motivations.

The ceremony recognized teachers from 16 school districts and three Regional Occupational Programs for excellence in education.

"Everybody here is a superhero, and you demon-

strated vividly tonight what you accomplish every day," county schools Superintendent Sheila Jordan told the assembled teachers at the end of the ceremony.

"The light that we shine on you reflects honor and credit on the whole teaching profession at a time when such honor and credit unfortunately is in short supply, but more richly deserved than ever."

Contact Rob Dennis  
at 510-353-7010

250