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## A Golden Apple for teaching excellence

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# A Golden Apple for teaching excellence

A graduate of IWU's Elementary Education program, Cara Spitzner '03 won the Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching for her work in the 4th grade at Ogden Avenue School in LaGrange, Ill.

Golden Apple is a non-profit organization that works to inspire, develop, and support teacher and school leader excellence in Illinois, especially in schools of need.

Cara has been at her school for 14 years. She emphasizes cultural diversity in all her lessons to encourage students to develop an understanding of the world outside the community in which they live.

Cara focuses on real-world experiences in her teaching. While teaching a unit on agriculture recently, she organized a field trip to the local farmer's market and invited a local farmer to visit her classroom to talk about farming. Her classroom environment is described as warm and encouraging, where students are taught to treat one another with respect and empathy.

Fellow educator Sarah (King) Pariseau '03, who notified the University of Cara's award, says Cara is an excellent representative of both IWU's elementary education program and also the humanist, liberal arts foundation of the University, especially the Minor Myers jr. motto, "Go into the world and do well, but more importantly, go into the world and do good."

Cara says she is inspired by the quote, which has hung in her classroom for more than a decade.

After winning the award, Cara wrote the following about her profession: "We use our eyes to see students who think we don't notice. We stand with the quiet, observing children, and we ask them what they see. We listen to their answers, give them necessary space to open up, and prove to them that they're worthy of as much of it as they require. We use our ears to hear hidden cadence in our students' speech. We find the tones suggesting emotion they can't yet articulate.

"We expand our students' ability to believe in what's possible. We stretch our arms as far as we can in an effort to show how wide the world can be. We nurture the curiosity of students whose questions we can't answer, and we make them promise to never stop asking. We then use those arms to hold the students in a caring classroom community, safely insulated by high expectations of empathy."

