



THE Lebanon Reporter

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14, 2010

WWW.REPORTER.NET

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Ernest honored in Washington, D.C.

BY SARAH LANG
The Lebanon Reporter

Lebanon High School agriculture teacher Byron Ernest was one of three agriculture educators honored Monday in Washington, D.C., with the first-ever Distinguished Agriscience Educator Award.

The award, sponsored by the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation and the American Farm Bureau Federation, came with a \$10,000 award to support research.

According to the AFBF, the award was presented for an "exemplary innovation in the field of agriculture science" and to those who "emphasize concepts, principles and applications in their curriculum to promote the study of agricultural science to students."

"The winning candidates have demonstrated a hunger for forward-thinking scientific knowledge," said AFBF President Bob Stallman at the awards ceremony. "The fruits of their work will be seen as America continues to lead the way in agricultural science innovation."

Along with Ernest, Lisa Konkel of Walworth, Wis., and Crystal Retzlaff



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Byron Ernest poses in front of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Hope, and son, Heath.

of Oconto Falls, Wis., were also honored with the award.

Though Ernest thanks the CCFE and the AFBF for making this "incredible opportunity and honor" possible, he said it's really not about him.

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Ernest

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To explain Ernest said, a few years ago he spent a day with former Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw. And Bradshaw told him a story that changed his life.

Bradshaw told Ernest the story of being on the 4-yard line, ready to score a game-winning touchdown for his fourth Super Bowl win. And Bradshaw took a timeout. He spun around and looked at the crowd who always supported him, the line who protected him, the running backs who made him look good, and the coaches who taught him.

"Then he said the words that have guided me since then," Ernest said. "He said, 'It was then that I realized it was not about me. It is about all of those who support me.'"

The same support that Bradshaw shared applies to Ernest as well, he said. His supporters are Purdue University for backing his dream of having three dual-credit courses in Advanced Life Science, agribusinesses like AgReliant Genetics that allow his students to do real

research in real time, Lebanon's school administration and board, students who expect the best of their teachers, and the fellow LHS teachers who expect him to teach at his highest level every day.

"The purpose is far greater than personal fulfillment, happiness, family, career or our wildest dreams and ambitions," Ernest said. "It's all about the students — students who need the rigor, relevance and relationships of science taught in the context that agriculture brings."

"This recognition has given Ernest a great chance to take an introspective look at LHS' agriculture program to make sure it is living up to the standards set by the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation and the American Farm Bureau Federation, Ernest said.

"Success presents as many challenges as setbacks do," Ernest said, quoting New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees. "It is my sincere goal to be a good steward of this honor, and to use it to build future successes and opportunities for the students of Lebanon High School."



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Presenting Byron Ernest, center, the Distinguished Agriscience Educator Award in Washington, D.C., were Bob Stallman, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, and Kimberly Owens, chair of the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Federation.