

Avon

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about 250 students in the entire school district, Cameron said. "They couldn't believe the (small) size of our school," she said. "They were surprised at our (limited) resources. And with such small classes like ours, one student can make it or break it when it comes to test scores."

However, Knodel believes that Avon's small enrollment pays off in huge ways.

"Our size is our strength," she said. "We work closely with our students. And we teachers work together as a team. If one teacher comes up with a good idea, he or she shares it with the others."

The Avon elementary teachers include Dawn Kocmich, kindergarten; Benita Kuhlman, first grade; Tina Cameron, second grade; Amy Cooper and Loretta Knodel, team-teaching third and fourth grades; and Beth Dykstra and Shelly Poppe, team-teaching fifth and sixth grades.

Although they saw many impressive landmarks during their D.C. trip, Knodel and Cameron came away ecstatic from the Blue Ribbon programs.

"It was great to meet all the teachers from the other regions and to share ideas," Knodel said.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan and others are stressing respect for the teaching profession, Cameron said.

"We need to get rid of the clichés and treat teachers in a professional way," she said. "As one speaker said, we need to replace the phrase 'Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach,' with the motto, 'Those who can, do, because of a teacher.'"

The nation's future depends on a strong educational system, Knodel said.

"Our economic prosperity depends on what happens in the classroom," she said.

A TEAM EFFORT

During Monday's program, Avon school board president Jerry Finck credited a total effort for the Blue Ribbon School award.

"I like to think we are a team," he said. "This is a team award and a team concept."

South Dakota Education Secretary Melody Schopp, the guest speaker, told the Avon audience to proclaim the school's greatness. As part of that move, she spoke of Avon's award during a state board of education meeting in Mitchell earlier in the day.

"What you have achieved at Avon isn't achieved at many schools in the nation," she said. "Make sure you brag about what you have done."

To qualify for the Blue Ribbon Award, schools must meet one of two criteria, Schopp said. A school must show continued excellence over a sustained period of test scores or have at least 40 percent of its students receiving free or reduced lunches and making significant gains in test scores.

Avon won the Blue Ribbon Award by meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements, according to Superintendent/Elementary Principal Tom Culver.

Teachers form the cornerstone of an outstanding school system, Schopp said.

"You can have the nicest building, but if you don't have the best teachers, it doesn't matter," she said, asking teachers in the audience to stand up and receive applause.

Schopp pointed to the characteristics of a high-performing school. They include a clear and shared focus, effective leadership and high levels of communication and collaboration among the entire school and community.

Other factors include curriculum that meets standards, a supportive learning environment and a high level of family and community involvement.

"When you set high expectations, students do better," Schopp said. "In fact, one of the bigger complaints among students is that school is boring."

Schopp said she knows of Avon's support of its school system through her friendship with former Avon superintendent Tom Oster, who later served as state education secretary.

"When (Oster) was here, he said he had the community behind him and had the community involved," Schopp said. "It's not just the school, it's the community itself."

THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

When school budget cuts didn't leave money for the Washington, D.C., trip, the community raised \$2,000 within an hour so Avon would be represented at the Blue Ribbon awards ceremony, Culver said.

The national recognition and private fundraising for academics aren't unknown to the school district, Culver said.

"In my 13 years here, we have gotten the support for anything we have related to the community," he said. "(2009 South Dakota Teacher of the Year) Paul Kuhlman receives donations so he can give prizes for his science fairs."

Avon patrons also show strong support for extracurricular activities, Culver said.

"Whether it's athletics or fine



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D

The Avon elementary teachers proudly display the plaque as one of the nation's Blue Ribbon Schools. The plaque and accompanying flag will hold a special place in a trophy case. The community raised \$2,000 in an hour so two teachers could represent the school at the national ceremony in Washington, D.C.

arts, Avon has been a great community to be part of," he said. "I hope we keep the positive relationship between the school and community."

During Monday's program, District 19 Rep. Frank Kloucek (D-Scotland) spoke from the audience and noted the Blue Ribbon award's criteria is very specific and not easy to achieve.

"It is said that education does not cost — it pays," he said. "It pays huge dividends as our young people receive an excellent, well-rounded education in our public school system that will travel with them throughout their lifetimes to help them succeed in their careers and life goals."

Kloucek congratulated the parents who work with the students and teachers to achieve excellence.

"As our young people go down the pathway of life, there are many paths and bridges to cross," he said. "The milestone achievement they have earned, and are recognized for today will go a long way towards making those paths and bridges easier to cross."

In separate remarks to the Press & Dakotan, Avon teacher Benita and Paul Kuhlman — who have now both received national recognition — said their school's success didn't occur overnight or in a vacuum.

"I truly believe we have shown academic excellence in our school because of superb parent involvement," Benita said. "I always compliment my (students') parents at conferences for putting in that extra effort at home. Without them, I can't do my job."

Benita said her first graders bring her joy and make her smile. "Teaching is my passion. I can't

think of another profession that I would rather do," she said. "Many of my teachers back in Ashley Public School, in Ashley, N.D., inspired me. I begged for any leftover materials at the end of the year so I could play school with my dolls!"

Benita said she and her husband fuel each other's love for teaching.

"Paul and I complement each other very well when it comes to our profession. We both think about school seven days a week," she said. "I'd like to think I plant the seeds, and I am lucky then to watch them grow (through Paul) to high school and beyond."

One key to success is holding high expectations of students, Paul said.

"We (as a couple) believe that our students can do more than they think they can," he said. "(We are) expecting our students to do well, (and we are) participating in professional development activities. I think all of the teachers here at Avon do these things very well."

The Blue Ribbon Award truly is a team effort all the way around, Paul said.

"The support of the community, parents and administration in Avon is extraordinary," he said. "Whether it comes to volunteering or financial support, they always are willing to help out."

The Avon students are the true winners as a Blue Ribbon School, Paul said.

"The awards are great, but it is truly the kids that deserve all of the credit," he said. "Their hard work, efforts and attitudes are what makes the rest of us look great and is a tribute to their parents for the values that they instill in their children."

We repeat this poem every year because we never tire of expressing our thankfulness to all the special people who have crossed our path in this busy world and stressful business!

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There are signs to Plant and reports to make . . .

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But what keeps us sane and makes our day,
Are buyers and sellers who pass our way !

That is Why Thanksgiving couldn't come and go
Without us stopping to let You all know . . .

Real estate would be a drudge if Not for you
'Cause you make Worthwhile the Things that we do.

Thank You for letting us be part of your Life,
Sharing The fun as well as the strife.

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And have More in your Pocket than You can Spend !



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