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WIHI Teacher has the Winning Formula

The accidental educator is now an award-winning teacher.

Aly Thompson was always wired to pursue a career in science, but it wasn't until she and her husband Nik completed their undergraduate degrees, and took a teaching assignment in China, that she realized she enjoyed the classroom experience. Fourteen years later, the Washtenaw International High School (WIHI) teacher is a 2022 Science/Math Teacher of the Year recipient, awarded by the University of Michigan Chapter of Sigma Xi, the Scientific Research Honor Society. Thompson says she doesn't like being the center of attention, but the recognition is affirming.

"I'm very honored to receive the award. The last couple of years of teaching during a pandemic has been the most challenging years of my career. Being recognized during a difficult time is a boost and gives me back some confidence," she said.

The principal of WIHI, Nhu Do, said Thompson is an exceptional educator.

"Ms. Thompson is, hands down, one of the most engaging, inspiring, passionate, knowledgeable, and caring science educators I have had the pleasure of working with during my 20 years as an educational leader," said Do. "She makes it a priority to show every student that she genuinely cares about them and believes in their success. Through creative, skill-based, and student-centered lesson plans that offer students meaningful choices, Ms. Thompson exudes joy and passion that inspires students to love learning and thrive in school. She pays particular attention to historically marginalized students and makes every effort to engage, encourage, and inspire students to persist."

Thompson describes her classroom as a space where everyone is invested in learning, including herself.

"I think of my classroom as a place where we're working collaboratively and learning from each other," Thompson explains. "It's not about me being the expert in the room but about the students doing the talking, working together, solving problems, and asking questions. I'm there to help them dig into the science and act as a facilitator."

Asked about encouraging others to pursue a career in education, Thompson said it's worthwhile.

"If you enjoy the ultimate challenge, have a creative side, and you like to present and make a subject come alive for students, teaching is the career for you," said Thompson. "In my heart of hearts, I'm a kid, and I love to be with kids."

Thompson is married with two children and a dog. When she's not in the classroom, Thompson enjoys family time, camping, outdoor adventures, and exercising. Next month she will be honored by the U-M Sigma Xi during a virtual ceremony and afterward will receive a \$750 gift.

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