

# SCHOOLS

## Award recognizes efforts to take learning beyond classroom

■ *Worthingway teacher Michelle Charity has earned the Gary Smith Compassionate Teaching Award.*

By PAMELA WILLIS

Suburban News Publications

Michelle Charity's compassion in the classroom and her determination to help students expand their experiences have earned her the Gary Smith Compassionate Teaching Award.

Charity received the award at the Sept. 10 meeting of the Worthington school board.

Worthington Kilbourne High School teacher Niki Gnezda and her children Yvonne, Tony and Katherine created the award in honor of Gnezda's late husband, Gary Smith, who was an educator and coach in the dis-

trict for 30 years.

Gnezda told board members what the award represents and why Charity is this year's recipient, then introduced Zach Zmigrodski, the student who nominated Charity.

"Shelly Charity has a long career and a long history of working with students who were falling through the cracks," she said. "Zach wrote on his nomination that 'Mrs. Charity went out of her way to know me when other teachers didn't.'"

Charity teaches eighth grade and Enriched English at Worthingway Middle School.

"Her principal, Santha Stall, said, 'Nothing gets in Shelly's way - if *no* is the first answer, she finds a way to make it *yes* if it is in the best interest of the kids,'" Gnezda said.

Charity said she was "shocked" when she heard her name called as the 2007 winner of the award at the

convocation ceremony Aug. 27.

"All those years I saw teachers get the award, I thought they knew ahead of time," she said, "so I was truly shocked when my name was announced - but it was a good shock."

She thanked Zmigrodski for nominating her.

"It warms my heart to think that in some way I was able to make an impression on you, because you made an impression on me," she told him. "I told my husband I learned about zeppelins from Zach. Before that, I thought they were a rock group."

Charity said she remembered teaching Gnezda's son while she was a teacher in the Christopher Program, an alternative school that infuses traditional high school courses with an international and global focus.

"When Tony came to us, he brought with him every single day, compassion, un-

derstanding and a good sense of humor," she said. "I respect and admire this family, so it is an honor to receive this award."

Charity has been a teacher at Worthingway for the past three years and has taught in the district for seven years. She was named International Educator of the Year in 2001 and was awarded the Global Educator Award from the Peace Corps in 2003.

Charity traveled to Japan in June 2006 through the Japan Fulbright Memorial Teacher Fund.

"My philosophy in education is to give kids as many experiences as possible and to expose them to diverse ways of thinking," she said. "I want to get their minds out of Worthington and into the world."

"I can't do everything or be everything, and I'm not some kind of super-teacher, so I've found success in taking one small thing and doing it the best I can,

which is giving kids the experience to learn on their own and trying to give them guidelines for making decisions," she said. "I give them direction and let them come up with their own conclusions."

Gnezda said she receives about 50 nominations each year for the award. She reviews the applications, then sends them to her children, who make the final decision.

Gary Smith was in hospice care when the award was conceived, after a diagnosis of cancer in January 1998. He was the founder of the Occupational Work Adjustment class, which is now the Career-Based Intervention Program. He was named district coach of the year 18 times and his teams won two state championships. He also began the middle school track and field program and is a member of the state and cross country Coaches Hall of Fame.



Michelle Charity

"Gary had a deep-seated belief in the potential of his students," she said. "So many times Gary went out of his way to help students - he fed them, bought them track shoes and took them into our home when they needed a place to stay. We established the award in his honor in 1998 and first awarded it in 2000."

## Stereotypes belied in grad's 'life-changing' trip to Kenya

By PAMELA WILLIS

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Carrie Hoffman's trip to Kenya included immersion into African culture and construction of an orphanage.

Hoffman, 20, worked in Kenya from June 12 to Aug. 15 with Operation Crossroads Africa.

"Every summer, they

she said. "I hope to become a documentary filmmaker. I want to travel and raise awareness of important subjects and life in other countries."

Hoffman said she traveled with nine other students, each of whom had to raise \$4,000 for the trip.

After flying into Nairobi, the group traveled through central Kenya to Nkubu.

*"They have such a positive attitude (in Kenya) and there are tons of people there trying to make a difference in the world."*

-Carrie Hoffman

2005 Thomas Worthington graduate

with their homework, tutor them and give them some attention," she said. "We got

hard for them to do with no parents and no money."

The group took weekend

