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### **Smithfield Middle Teacher Receives State Award for Exemplary Teaching in Science**

*Ellen Peterson was honored by the Virginia Association of Science Teachers with the prestigious award*

**Isle of Wight Co, VA – November 30, 2018:** Ellen Peterson, a seventh grade science teacher at Smithfield Middle School in Smithfield, Virginia, has been awarded the 2018 Donna R. Sterling Exemplary Science Teaching Award. This award, sponsored by the Virginia Association of Science Teachers (VAST), goes to one teacher in Virginia each year, and is awarded based upon the teacher's description of the results of teaching a science unit of his or her choice, a plan for using the award funds in personal professional development and on letters of recommendation from administrators, parents, and other teachers. The award has a total value of \$5,000.

The award was given to Peterson on November 15, 2018 at the 2018 Professional Development Institute of the Virginia Association of Science Teachers, in Williamsburg, VA. Peterson plans to use the award money to attend workshops on 3-D printing and to purchase a 3-D printer for use in her classroom so that her own students can design and actually print out their ideas for organism adaptations. Additional technologies Peterson plans on learning about and using include 360 degree cameras, virtual reality devices, and drones. After training on these technologies, this Sterling awardee plans on providing workshops to her colleagues at Smithfield Middle School so that the entire student body can benefit from her award.

In her award application, Peterson described a science unit that began on the second day of school and extended throughout the year. In this unit, the seventh graders took on the role of monarch butterflies. They raised monarch caterpillars, released the butterflies after metamorphosis, programmed a robot to show the stages of the life cycle and learned much about the needs of living



things and the threats to the monarch butterfly and other organisms, with the assistance of Peterson and Ruth Meredith, a school parent. The seventh graders wanted to do something to help preserve the environment needed by monarch butterflies. Peterson arranged for them to make a presentation to the Smithfield Town Council on what Smithfield could do to assist monarchs in their life cycle and migration. Then the students planted a milkweed garden, which became an official way station for a national organization called Monarch Watch (MonarchWatch.org).

One parent reported in her letter of recommendation that her daughter, while struggling with a physical disability that required hospitalization for an extensive period, was included in all aspects of the monarch project. The seventh grader worked with her butterfly team by way of Facetime, and was even able to “attend” the Smithfield Town Council meeting, coordinated by Peterson. In the letter, the parent stated, “It’s incredible as a parent to watch your child become so fully engaged time after time in science.”

The principal of Smithfield Middle School, Fred Eng, noted that Peterson’s students have opportunities to develop their own unique gifts and talents, a core mission of Isle of Wight County Schools. He added that Peterson “invests her time and energies into ensuring a deeper understanding of the content and allowing for student led activities that do not fail to engage all of her students. Ms. Peterson’s classroom is always full of activity, interaction, but above all, learning and fun.”

After her training with 3-D printing and the other technologies, Peterson plans to attend the 2019 annual conference of the Virginia Association of Science Teachers to share ideas with other teachers about activities, community connections, and techniques that can benefit students in the classroom. These experiences will enable her “to focus on the development of projects that authentically incorporate technology as tools instead of as the purpose for the lesson.”

The Sterling award for 2019 will be given to an elementary (K-6) science teacher. For more information on the award, visit [www.vast.org](http://www.vast.org).

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