



PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



Joe Skinner

Naaman Forest High School
in Garland

Horticulture program grows under care of dedicated teacher

Few professions can touch and shape lives the way teaching can. Joe Skinner, horticulture teacher at Garland's Naaman Forest High School, has helped students grow and blossom during his 40 years of teaching.

When Mr. Skinner was hired at Naaman Forest, he had the unique opportunity to develop the school's horticulture program from the ground up. This specialized high school curriculum is offered across the state, Mr. Skinner says, but Naaman Forest's is recognized as one of the top three programs in Texas.

No doubt Mr. Skinner is responsible for much of this recognition. His appreciation for the field is evident in all he has done to develop the program. His students will grow more than 17,000 plants this year, most of which will be sold at a plant sale in early April. Students are responsible for planning, planting and maintaining color beds around the school campus, as well as maintaining the baseball field.

"A couple of years ago, they named the ball field 'Skinner Field' in my honor," Mr. Skinner says. "That was quite remarkable, since things like that usually aren't done for someone who's living."

While he is proud of having received that honor, he is much prouder of his many students who have gone on to successful horticulture careers.

"Several of my past students are involved with golf-course maintenance at country clubs, and that's a very lucrative field," he says. "Several other students are arborists, some work at nurseries, and some even have their own businesses. One owns 26 greenhouses, and has major landscaping contracts with the city of Dallas."

Mr. Skinner's teaching has equipped students to be successful horticulturists, and to make contributions to society in other ways as well. "Our program is designed to serve all students," he says. "Our greenhouses can accommodate wheelchairs, and we've had many special needs kids participate in our program."

Giving back to the community is evidenced by several projects.

"The students maintain a Spirit Bed, a garden that commemorates Garland police officers who have died in the line of duty," he says. "The kids take care of it, and I had a bench and all the plant materials donated."

Later this spring, Naaman Forest horticulture students will landscape the Habitat for Humanity home the school built, he says.

Community involvement works both ways, Mr. Skinner says.

"We're strongly supported by the Men's Garden Club of Dallas, both in terms of scholarship donations and advice. The Daylily Growers of Dallas have given over \$11,000 in scholarship money over the past five years," he says. "And the Northeast Texas Nursery Growers use our students to help with their displays at a wholesale show they do. They get the labor, and our students get great experience."

Over the years, Mr. Skinner has been recognized several times for his dedication to his teaching career and his students. He was named Teacher of the Year in 1983 while teaching in the Dallas Independent School District, and he was Garland Teacher of the Year in 1999.

Accolades and recognition are wonderful, Mr. Skinner says, but the best part of his job is the encouragement and appreciation he receives from his students.

"Some kids need a little extra attention, and I feel I serve that need."

He also has been gratified to see the success his students have enjoyed after completing his program and going on to major in horticulture at area universities.

"It's very rewarding to receive words of thanks from students. I've never heard a negative comment," he says.

It's clear that his dedication has put down roots in North Texas, and the program Mr. Skinner has nurtured and shaped will continue to touch students' lives for years to come.



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