



# PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



## Don Kelly

### Hands-on teacher passes along skills that last students a lifetime

"I didn't like school. I just wanted to get out," says Don Kelly, construction

technology teacher

at Hudson Middle School. How ironic, then, that he's been a teacher for 36 years – and is this month's Garland ISD Teacher of the Month.

"When I got into high school and started in Industrial Arts, that kept me in school," he says, adding that he wanted to share that interest in construction, mechanics, and engines with students who may have felt as uninspired in school as he once was.

Obviously his passion has paid off. "Some of my previous students are now in that line of work," he says proudly.

In a curriculum that introduces students to wood and metal working, construction, and power mechanics, Mr. Kelly provides many of his students with their first experience with power tools in what he calls the school's "dirty lab. They learn what goes into building houses, and they gain experience in cutting boards, making bowls, learning about small engines, even race cars, energy and electricity," he says.

"A lot of what we do is science and math related," Mr. Kelly says. For example, the portion of his class that looks at home construction involves a great deal of math, and his emphasis on green building and energy conservation draws on science.

Students who choose to pursue construction technology take similar, though more in-depth, classes at high school, then apprentice in their chosen trade after graduation, he says.

At the middle-school level, students work with a drill press, a wood lathe, and a jigsaw – some of the smaller machines – then move on to larger machines as they get older, Mr. Kelly says.

Giving students an opportunity to delve into this curriculum exposes them to a variety of trades that they might choose to pursue later in life. "These classes offer the students a chance to explore and see what they like.

Some don't like the paperwork associated with traditional classes, but they enjoy the hands-on experiences they get in my classes," he says.

Gone are the days when the industrial arts classes of yore attracted only boys. "I have about one-third girls and two-thirds boys. Some of the girls really get into building, and I had two girls who won Best in District in woodworking recently," he says.

That kind of success has fueled Mr. Kelly over the past three and a half decades of teaching. He says he finds it so gratifying to "watch their eyes light up when they understand a concept and get to apply what they've learned from me or in other classes," he says.

No doubt Mr. Kelly has seen that light bulb switch on in plenty of eyes over the years. "He has been in this building since it opened," says Hudson principal Michelle Bounds, "and he has done amazing things with our kids. Just recently, our middle school was named outstanding career and technology middle school for the district."

The same commitment Mr. Kelly applies to teaching goes into his work behind the scenes as well, Ms. Bounds says. "He helps out everyone in the building when they need help with their computers. He is also very active with the state organization that develops career and technology curriculum, and has been involved with that group for years," she says.

After teaching computer classes for several years, Mr. Kelly says he welcomed the opportunity to return to the dirty lab he planned, developed, and implemented at Hudson Middle School.

"They thought I was crazy to go back to the dirty lab, but that's what I really love," he says.

That passion has helped countless students over the years find renewed purpose in school and open doors to their futures. Hudson Middle School's students are fortunate to have a teacher of Don Kelly's commitment and caliber on its staff.



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