

Brian Tibbetts 2008

The Illinois Teacher of the Year Award was established by ICC in 1985 in order to recognize outstanding teachers of Latin K-12 in the State of Illinois. In 1990 the award was named in honor of the late Farrand Baker, long-time teacher of Latin at Oak Park River Forest High School, former president of ICC, and a dynamic teacher himself. The ideal recipient of this award demonstrates not only exemplary teaching of Latin but also outstanding service to ICC, dedication to the cause of Classics in the teacher's home community and participation in regional and national organizations of the Classics. I would now ask any previous recipients of this award to stand and be recognized.

Tonight we add another name to the long list of distinguished recipients of this award. The 2008 Illinois Latin teacher of the year was graduated from St. Louis University High School in 1992 and attended Knox College, where he intended to study creative writing. Having taken Latin in high school, however, he made the fatal decision to continue his study of the language in college and was, thanks to classics professors Steve and Brenda Fineberg, hooked. During his time at Knox, he studied both Latin and Greek, was actively involved in the theatre department, served as a Latin tutor, and completed an honors project on the poetry of Callimachus called *Illusion and Desire: Disguising the Self in the Erotic Epigrams of Callimachus*. He graduated from Knox in 1996 with a bachelor's degree in classics.

For the next five years our honoree pursued his love of theater, not Latin, but eventually decided to return to school and get his teaching certificate in English. Yes, English. It was Brenda Fineberg who reminded him of his love of Latin, convincing him to pursue classics once again. So he entered the University of Iowa to study secondary education and Latin and received his teaching certificate in 2002. In the fall of 2003 he joined the staff of Monmouth-Roseville High School as their Latin teacher, where he has worked tirelessly and successfully to revive and enhance the school's Latin program. While other Latin programs in west central Illinois are in jeopardy or defunct, the program at Monmouth-Roseville High School is thriving and the administration likes to boast proudly that Monmouth-Roseville is the smallest high school in the state which offers Latin.

Our honoree naturally serves as advisor to the Latin Club and helps them produce memorable Latin-themed floats for the homecoming parade. Every winter he works with his Latin 4 students to organize the annual Classics Bee, which introduces elementary and junior high school students to the classics. All 5th through 8th grade students in the district take a written qualifying test and the best scorers in each grade are invited to the Classics Bee, modeled on a Spelling Bee and Jeopardy. The event is designed to show all students in the district that Latin is already part of their lives and to encourage them to study Latin in high school. It works!

His teaching and his program have caught the attention of the local media. Last January the *Galesburg Register Mail* ran a feature story about Latin at Monmouth-Roseville, in which our Latin teacher was praised combining the study of Latin with the culture, history and the mythology of Rome. He uses gladiator action figures and the game Slapboard - a game where students see who can give the definition of a word and slap the chalkboard with an eraser first - to help keep students interested. "Sometimes he kicks our desk when we're sleeping to wake us up," said one student known as "Simius Rex" in Latin class. His approach to teaching is what several of his students say ranks him as one of their favorite teachers. "He's very energetic and he just doesn't give you a book or words to learn from," said another student known as "Regina" in Latin class. A student

who graduated four years ago writes: “He was possibly one of the most motivating teachers I had in High School. He gave a new color and more charm to Latin that made it revitalized and come anew every day.” A more recent graduate adds the following: “I have never had a teacher as dedicated or energetic to everyday lessons. He made all of my classes I had with him over the course of four years fun and memorable. He is the reason I became so interested in Latin and I will always remember things such as ‘PFAM!’” [Ask him about PFAM after he receives his award.] This student continues, “With his drive for his students to excel in Latin, I took it upon myself to apply for a scholarship to study Latin in college. Due to his hard-work and teaching ability, I was granted the scholarship that would later help further my advancement and the appreciation for the language; this interest, which Mr. Tibbets planted, blossomed into a passion.

In his five years at Monmouth-Roseville, he has taken two groups of students to Italy to study first-hand Roman civilization and culture. He currently serves as the schools’ girls track coach—his 4 X 8 team was the 2007 state champion—and he also serves as president of the Monmouth-Roseville teachers’ union.

For several years he has enhanced our ICC meetings by serving as the Book Display chair. He has already begun to make his mark beyond Illinois with a presentation on “LEGAMUS Transitional Readers” at the 2006 Summer Institute of the American Classical League in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Outside of school, our honoree serves on the board of the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site and Galesburg’s Family Planning Services. He lives in Galesburg with his wife, Megan, and daughter, Clara. Let us now recognize as the 2008 Farrand Baker Illinois Latin Teacher of the Year, Brian Tibbets.

A few others are waiting to congratulate him, as well. Let us join his wife, Megan, the Finebergs, and two principals from his school, in congratulating Brian.