

## **Dawn Strauss, 2013 Baker Award**

Over my desk where I do my Awards Committee work is a post-it with this quotation from Plautus: “Ut saepe summa ingenia in occulto latent” ...roughly translated as “How often does it happen that some great talents are hidden in obscurity.”

The mission of our committee tonight is to uncover some latent talents among our teaching comrades throughout the state and to bring them to the attention of all of you here and throughout the state every year, presenting the organization’s highest honor -- Illinois Latin Teacher of the Year.

Our honoree in 2013 is continuing the recent tradition of being a “homegrown” teacher – one who has lived and studied here in Illinois under the guidance of current and former Latin teachers from our organization. How very proud we are that our Latin instructors are of such caliber that they influence students to study and appreciate the classics.

Our honoree comes from the small town of Shabbona, Illinois. With very limited academic support from her family and only very basic learning opportunities in her small hometown school system, she began her Latin journey.. Despite these drawbacks, she was able to rise above these personal challenges with nothing short of hard work, intelligence and determination.

She entered the program at Monmouth College under Professor Tom Sienkiewicz with the intention of studying Spanish and becoming a high school Spanish teacher. Even though she had studied Latin only by long distance learning during high school, she acquired enough Latin not only to start in reading courses as a freshman, but was also awarded a Latin Performance Scholarship. She was soon elected to the Monmouth College chapter of Eta Sigma Phi, the national Classical honorary society, and became a Classics major. She attended several Eta Sigma Phi conventions and served for one year as a national officer. When Monmouth held the national convention of Eta Sigma Phi in 2001, she

was the local chair and proved herself to be an efficient manager and organizer for the event.

Our honoree has always challenged herself to perform at the highest possible level. A good example of this was her decision to do her student teaching under Judy Hayes at New Trier H.S.. I enjoyed hearing about her experiences as both a student and a teacher when she was the guest speaker at my own Latin banquet at Barrington Middle School that same year. Another student might have preferred a less high-powered assignment, but our nominee relished the opportunity and did such an excellent job that she was soon offered the position in 2005 at Kenwood Academy, replacing the retiring Alice Mulberry..

When our honoree began teaching there in the fall of 2005 there were only two periods of Latin, necessitating her to once again draw on her Spanish to create a full time job for herself. In that same year, she participated in an outstanding pre-institute workshop at ACL entitled "Creating Bridges Between Latin and Spanish." Her background in both languages made her an excellent presenter, along with Daniel Erickson of the University of North Dakota, and Susan Robertson of Estacado H.S. in Lubbock, Texas.

But in just a few years she built up the Latin program at her school to five full classes and was able to put aside the Spanish. There are currently six classes of Latin at Kenwood, including an AP Latin program which she initiated. Once again, her concern that her students have all the opportunities and advantages available to other students motivated her to institute this course. Prior to this, she contacted several teachers across the country about their existing programs and tapped into their prior experience in teaching AP.

Knowing the value of mentors, our honoree has also offered to serve as a mentor for a student teacher this past year. Assuming this role, as we all know, demands a tremendous amount of time and skill, but paying it forward is important to her.

Participation in extra curricular Latin activities is also an important factor in the selection of this year's nominee. Her students participate in the state JCL conventions and the Illinois Certamen League, as well as the National Latin Exam and National Mythology Exams. Furthermore, her students participate in the Chicago Public School Latin Olympics which she has organized on the high school level at Kenwood since 2009, after having briefly been in charge of the Art Contest in that competition in earlier years.. When the Olympics were moved from UIC, the facilities at Kenwood were offered in an effort not to let this outstanding program die for lack of a home. It is a huge undertaking, and while other teachers have helped, the task has rested squarely on her shoulders. She has solicited all the workers, provided all the necessary materials, made all the arrangements and managed to do all of this with her usual calm and grace. In spite of the fact that she wears the top hat for this event, she still finds time to interface with, listen to, and respond to her own students.

And finally, on top of her other achievements, it should be mentioned that she commits to all of these time consuming activities while being mother to a young child, whose antics I have been enjoying on Facebook from time to time and at the recent IJCL convention.

To sum it all up, our winner brings tremendous energy, creativity, and generosity to the teaching of Latin. We take pride in honoring one of "our own"

The Illinois Latin Teacher of the Year 2012 – from Kenwood Academy,  
Dawn McRoberts Strauss.

--presented in honor of Dawn Strauss

at the Illinois Classical Conference Annual Meeting

October 12, 2013

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL