

# Wood River teacher finalist for Illinois Teacher of the Year

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**WOOD RIVER** - A Lewis and Clark Jr. High P.E. teacher is one of 10 finalists for the Illinois Teacher of the Year Award.

**Matt Herndon**, who has been teaching at the school for 19 years said teaching was in his blood. His father, grandfather, great grandfather, grandmother and wife are all

teachers. Herndon is the athletic director and P.E. teacher at the junior high, and describes his teaching methods as a bit "unconventional."

"I just try to make P.E. a positive experience for all my kids," he said. "I try to do things students don't get or see usually. On Thursday, I took my entire eighth grade P.E. class to **Pride Fitness** in Wood River, and they did some circuit training with the managers."

Herndon's P.E. classes also play conventional sports and he teaches them weight training. One of his largest contributions to the school was a top-of-the-line weight room for his students, built in conjunction with the former principal. Herndon helped raise the \$12,000 in funds required to build the weight room from "practically nothing." Now, Lewis and Clark Jr. High students have two high class weight rooms to utilize.

"We have two fabulous weight rooms in the basement kids love," Herndon said.

Herndon was chosen as Teacher of the Year in his district through the **Those Who Excel Program**, which is done through the **Illinois State Board of Education**. After winning this award, Herndon filed paperwork and sent it to the state. From that point, he was interviewed in **Springfield**, and was recently announced as a top 10 finalist for the honor of being the Illinois Teacher of the Year.

If he wins that distinguished honor, Herndon will be entered to be the National Teacher of the Year. He will also be invited to meet the president (whoever that may be), go to conferences across the country, visit Washington D.C., for a week and spend a week at space camp in Alabama.

"It's kind of a whirlwind thing," he said. "I've had lots of stuff going on since the top 10. It's very exciting and fun."

Regardless of how the awards go, Herndon said he will continue to do the best job he can for his students, and continue to represent the River Bend area the best he can.

"I'll just keep doing the best job I can and find new and creative ways to keep kids involved in healthy lifestyles," he said. "I hope to be able to represent the great teachers in the River Bend area. We have a lot of great teachers in this area."

*If you know of an outstanding teacher you would like to recognize, please send your tip to [news@riverbender.com](mailto:news@riverbender.com).*