



Debbie Witsken is 2012 Emerson Excellence in Education Award Winner

September 27 2012 2:11 PM

GODFREY - Debbie Witsken, an associate professor in Lewis and Clark Community College's Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) program, is the college's 2012 Emerson Excellence in Education Award winner.

"This is the proudest moment of my teaching career," Witsken said. "It reinforces my passion for teaching."

Emerson Electric has honored college and university faculty throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area for more than 20 years through their Excellence in Teaching Awards program. This annual event is a significant recognition of the dedicated professionals who have chosen to pursue careers in teaching. This year marks the 19th year that Lewis and Clark has participated in this regional recognition program.

Photo by S. Paige Allen: Debbie Witsken, an associate professor in Lewis and Clark Community College's Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) Program, is L&C's 2012 Emerson Excellence in Education Award winner.

"Debbie represents what I would call the 'total package' of a college professor because she excels in her delivery of classroom material, remains the expert in her technical field by practicing on a per diem basis at a hospital, and contributes to the larger campus

community," said Linda Chapman, vice president of Academic Affairs at L&C. "She uses her clinical experience to make her program very connected to her profession and to the clients who her students will be serving upon graduation."

Witsken began her career at L&C as a lab instructor in the fall of 2007. The following spring a full-time position opened up in the OTA program, and she has been working her "dream job" ever since. This fall she began her fifth year as a full-time L&C employee, and she finds the college to be a positive learning environment, in which everyone is willing to do what it takes to help students further their education.

"Lewis and Clark is a dynamic place to work where the faculty and students are challenged to be the best they can be," Witsken said. "It is evident that faculty and students are part of a culture that promotes innovation, service and life-long learning. I can honestly say I love being a part of the Lewis and Clark family. It is a great feeling to work with a supportive group of faculty who are equally engaged in the teaching and learning processes."

Before coming to L&C, Witsken began her career working at the Rehabilitation Institute of St. Louis providing inpatient therapy services for individuals with neurological deficits, such as strokes or brain injuries. After having children of her own, she made a career switch to the school setting and worked for four years providing school-based occupational therapy services.. While working in the schools, she made a choice to continue her education in the area of teaching so she could better serve the children with which she worked.

"I have always loved occupational therapy and interacting with others," Witsken said. "During my schooling, I was able to work as a lab instructor in the OTA program. It was the perfect mix - teaching individuals who were interested in occupational therapy enabled me to have the best of both worlds. I am passionate about both fields, and being able to share that with others on a daily basis is an amazing feeling."

Witsken said occupational therapy is all about teaching individuals how to continue completing their daily occupations, despite any limitations or difficulties, and sees the similarities between both fields.

She is very student-oriented and provides a variety of teaching methods to help students benefit from various learning styles, including lectures, small group discussions, technology-enhanced activities, community experiences and hands-on learning.

"I provide my students with the tools they need to be successful in the program and in the field of occupational therapy," Witsken said. "I challenge my students to go make a difference in the world. The field of occupational therapy requires commitment, dedication and service. Our goal as therapy practitioners is to make life meaningful for others."

Witsken's goal is to be the best teacher possible, while inspiring her students to be agents of change. She also strives to make a positive impact on all the lives of those with whom she interacts.

"It is very rewarding to assist individuals, communities and populations as they continue participating in their own daily occupations or other activities that are meaningful to them," Witsken said. "It is an amazing feeling to wake up every day and be able to do something you love."