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Hixson Teacher of the Year Program Honors 8 Local Teachers

-George Vredeveld of the Economics Center for Education & Research Keynotes Event -

(CINCINNATI; May 24, 2011) – Celebrating its 20th year in 2011, the Hixson Teacher of the Year program today awarded its top prize of \$5,000 to Venia Papanikolou, a 4th grade teacher of Language Arts and Social Studies from Donovan Elementary (Lebanon City Schools). First given in 1991 by Hixson, an architecture, engineering and interior design firm based in Mt. Adams, the Teacher of the Year program is just one way the firm contributes to the communities in which its associates live and work. All Hixson associates are eligible to nominate a child or grandchild for the Hixson Teacher of the Year program, which has awarded more than \$100,000 since its inception.

The award was presented at a ceremony honoring Papanikolou and the seven other finalists at the Hixson building in Mt. Adams. The evening began with a keynote presentation from George Vredeveld, President of the Economics Center for Education & Research. “I think it’s great that Hixson recognizes the value of education and gives back to the community,” said Vredeveld. “I hope other business in the area will follow their example.”

In addition to the remarks from Vredeveld, J. Wickliffe (“Wick”) Ach, CEO of Hixson, noted that “these talented men and women have dedicated themselves to an often thankless, but very worthwhile career...one which benefits all of us in the community. We are happy to be able to recognize and thank them for the very important work they do for our future generations.”

Roselia Harris, a Senior Interior Designer with Hixson, whose daughter Abby is in 4th grade at Donovan Elementary, nominated Papanikolou for the honor. In the nomination, Harris noted that Papanikolou is a “fabulous teacher who inspires our children.”

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For Papanikolou, who has taught at Donovan Elementary since 2008, the path to winning the Hixson award was not the typical one. Born and raised in Greece, Papanikolou moved to the U.S. to study English at the age of 19, earning a B.A. in English from Roosevelt University. From there, Papanikolou returned to Greece, where she established an English language school in a small village, an effort in which she says she “was the principal, teacher, secretary and occasionally the custodian!” After moving to the States with her husband and young daughter in 1990, Papanikolou earned her Master’s degree in Counselor’s Education from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and worked as a substance abuse counselor for eight years. Papanikolou then took a break to care for her growing family, but occasionally filled in as a substitute teacher. That experience, she says, revealed to her the possibilities inherent in the teaching profession. “Seeing the eager eyes of children, experiencing their struggles to master a skill, and their joy of achieving it, were experiences I did not want to miss,” said Papanikolou.

In 2008, Papanikolou earned her Teaching Certification in Middle Childhood (Language Arts/Social Studies) from Miami University. Now a teacher at Donovan Elementary in the Lebanon City Schools, Papanikolou, a resident of Mason, Ohio, is a strong advocate for the teaching profession. In her award-winning application, Papanikolou outlines her teaching philosophy:

“Educators are in a position to influence young minds and see someone not only as they are today, but how they can become. Education enabled my father help his family survive after World War II. I have seen dozens of people turn their life around thanks to the power of education. It continues to give me the way to improve myself.”

In addition to Papanikolou, the other finalists nominated by Hixson associates are:

- Vicki Esler, Kindergarten, Blue Ash Elementary, Blue Ash, OH
- Jennifer Isaacs, Grade 3, Monfort Heights Elementary, Cincinnati, OH
- Joanna Issenmann, Grade 2, St. Pius X School, Edgewood, KY
- Jorja Kremer, Grade 8 Science , St. Agnes School, Ft. Wright, KY

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- Allison Morse, Grade 1, St. Pius X School, Edgewood, KY
- Allison Pajk, Music, St. Pius X School, Edgewood, KY
- Michael Radtke, 9th Grade English, St. Bernard/Elmwood Place High School, Cincinnati, OH

All nominees completed an application process, which covered information such as professional development activities, community involvement and teaching philosophy. Submitted entries were reviewed by an independent panel comprised of school administrators and teachers from around the region, which selected Papanikolou as this year's Hixson Teacher of the Year recipient. In addition to the \$5,000 prize given to Papanikolou, each finalist received a \$100 award and a plaque recognizing their excellence at the Hixson reception.

Because Hixson believes in the power of education and the need to reward great teachers, the program's operations and information are available to any other company which would like to institute a similar educational awards program. Interested companies are encouraged to call Jenny Cox at 513-241-1230.



Hixson 2011 Teacher of the Year Winner Venia Papanikolou, Abby Harris (daughter of Hixson associate Roselia Harris) and Hixson CEO & President Wick Ach.

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Hixson 2011 Teacher of the Year Winner Venia Papanikolou, Abby Harris and Roselia Harris.

ABOUT HIXSON

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