

## O'Tremba honored with statewide leadership award

Stacey O'Tremba said she feels like she's been given a gift. That gift is the ability to motivate, inspire and teach organizational skills to students who might otherwise fall through the cracks in the educational system. As the district's Tier 2 Coordinator, O'Tremba does this on a daily basis for her students.

Those efforts to help "at-risk" students were recognized on Tuesday during a small ceremony at Lovell High School, where she was honored by the Craig and Susan Thomas Foundation with its statewide leadership award.



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Susan Thomas (right) paid a special visit to Lovell High School to present Stacey O'Tremba (left) with the Craig and Susan Thomas Foundation Leadership Award on Tuesday, May 19, for her work with at-risk students in Big Horn County School District No. 2.

Patti Carpenter photo

Susan Thomas presented the award to O'Tremba, which included a special etched trophy, inscribed with her name, and a \$2,500 check. In a heartfelt speech, Thomas explained that when her husband died in June of 2007, she wanted to do something to keep his legacy alive. She said her husband loved young people and enjoyed talking to them wherever he went. That, coupled with the fact that she taught students for more than 35 years who struggled with school, gave her the idea to create an organization that specifically worked to help those students.

"We do three specific things through our organization," she explained. "The first is to provide grants to organizations that think like we do, that everybody deserves another chance.

"We also give a mentoring scholarship to students, by semester, who do not qualify for any other scholarships, yet they want to continue their post secondary education. I've spent some of the morning here today talking about two of the students here (at LHS) who have applied for our scholarships.

"The third thing we do, which is our favorite thing to do, is to award a statewide annual leadership award to someone who has been nominated by their peers who has gone above and beyond the call of duty to help learners."

She said from everything she has learned about O'Tremba, she would sum her up as someone who creates opportunity for those who have shut down and don't see anything in their future.

"She provides inspiration to those young people that don't have inspiration at home but who want to do the same things we do," Thomas said. "They want jobs, they want careers, they want family and they want the ability to belong to a community.

"She also provides leadership. She gets in there and begins working with students. Craig and I have always felt we need great leaders like her to keep this country great."

Lovell Middle School Doug Hazen spoke on her behalf.

"If you've had the privilege to work with Mrs. O'Tremba like I have (as both a teacher and a principal) you understand that she is a tremendous asset to our school district, Hazen said. She has the unique ability to hold students accountable while showing compassion and humility. She is able to motivate our students better than any of them ever thought was possible for themselves.

"Stacey teaches and imparts invaluable skills to our most at-risk and highest need students, which I've always believed deserve our best teachers. I'm lucky enough at the middle school to be able to tell every parent of the children who work with Stacey that that is the case."

Hazen added that O'Tremba often does the little things that others don't do, like contacting parents, providing reading and math interventions and keeping students organized, even going as far as helping them clean their lockers and organizing their folders. He said she is an advocate for them and will even accompany them at times when they need to speak to their teachers.

"She is an advocate for them at all times," he said. "Nine-tenths of education is encouragement. Sometimes it's easy to forget that, however, Stacey never forgets that."

O'Tremba was nominated for the award by Aryn Tippetts.

Tippetts said, "Todd Whitaker once said 'the best part of teaching is that it matters.' He also said, 'The hardest part of teaching is that every moment matters, every day.' Stacey O'Tremba is a shining example of someone who makes every teaching moment matter, every day, through her tireless dedication on behalf of our students."

By Patti Carpenter

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