

Christina DiBartolo earns Watchung Hills Educator of the Year

- By NICOLE ZANCHELLI Staff Writer

WARREN TWP. - Putting in the extra hours and instilling confidence in students can make an average educator exemplary, one that leaves a positive mark on both colleagues and pupils.

That is exactly what math teacher Christina DiBartolo has done over the course of her 14-year tenure at Watchung Hills. Often starting her school day at 7 a.m. and staying until 4 p.m., DiBartolo has cemented herself as a prudent and attentive pillar in the high school community.

DiBartolo, known as “Chrissie” by her peers, was awarded Watchung Hills Educator of the Year in November 2021. She was interviewed on her accomplishment by **The Echoes-Sentinel** on Thursday, May 5 in honor of Teacher Appreciation Week, which runs from May 2-6.

“This seasoned and passionate educator tells her students that she wants them not only to focus on getting ‘the right answer,’ but to learn the material and appreciate all the ways math and technology can be used to enhance their daily lives,” said Watchung Hills Principal William Librera.

There were more than 40 educators nominated for the award based on specific criteria, including: establishing a meaningful rapport with students, inspiring a love



of learning, contributing to the school outside the classroom, and differentiating instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners.

DiBartolo currently teaches calculus and pre-calculus. In the past, she has also instructed geometry and algebra II and III. She serves on the Watchung Hills appeals committee, the National Honor Society review committee and the technology committee.

"I pursued a career in education so that I could help students to become more confident in their mathematical abilities, and be the person that believes in them," DiBartolo said. "I especially love having students two years in a row when I get to see that growth and see them mature into high school graduates."

The Educator of the Year award is not DiBartolo's first instruction-related accolade. School administration previously chose her as Watchung Hills' representative to compete for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

Librera described DiBartolo's classroom as a "kind of laboratory of collaborative ideas," an environment devoted to "not only encouraging students, but also her peers."

"One of her colleagues recently remarked that Chrissie has always been 'a great go-to person' at our school, and: 'Whenever I need help, I know she will be in my corner,'" Librera said.

'Special Joy'

Amidst the pandemic's hardships, DiBartolo adapted to an unprecedented situation and sought to meet challenges head-on with creativity.

Through her research, she identified an online solution to virtual learning, Classkick.

“Thanks to her leadership and dedication, over 90 percent of our teachers have interacted with students using this platform, helping to bridge the gap between virtual and in-person learning,” Librera said.

Being crowned Educator of the Year after the trials of virtual and hybrid instruction made the award all the more special to DiBartolo.

“It has been so difficult,” DiBartolo said. “It was so special to earn it this year knowing that I worked my tail off to try and find ways to help students be successful and be motivated during the pandemic.”

DiBartolo’s top priority is her students. During her tenure at Watchung Hills, she has spent half of nearly every year’s lunch periods in “Math Lab,” a place where students can get extra help regardless of who their teacher is.

“I have a special joy that I feel when I have a student who is struggling and they get over that hurdle,” DiBartolo said. “When I work with them, and see that the light clicks and they get it, that is such an exciting feeling for me.”

While students may not remember in the future how they used the law of sines to solve a trigonometric problem, she said, “they will remember how they persevered and with my support found success.”

“They will remember how they learned to advocate for themselves. They will remember that even when what they are learning is difficult, it is not impossible,” DiBartolo continued.

CHRISTINA DIBARTOLO