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TEACHERS FROM 5 STATES CITED AS TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE BY NATIONAL DRIVER ED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION AND THE NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY FOUNDATION

NEW YORK, July 22, 2019 -- Five driver education teachers from Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota and Vermont have been selected by their peers nationwide as Teachers of Excellence. The honor, from the American Driver & Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA), carries with it a cash stipend from The National Road Safety Foundation, a non-profit group that creates driver safety education materials and makes them available at no cost to teachers and schools, police, traffic safety advocates and youth organizations.

The 2019 Teachers of Excellence are Raymond Kroll, who teaches at DeLaSalle High School in Minneapolis; Robert Droege, a teacher at Lindbergh High School in St. Louis; Michael Jones, Sr., a teacher at South Mecklenburg High School and the Jordan Driving School in Charlotte, N.C.; Darin Bardal, an instructor in the West Fargo, N.D. public schools; and Stanley Blicharz, director of driver education in the West Rutland School District and Burr & Burton Academy in Vermont.

“Driving instructors are a dedicated and passionate group whose mission is to save lives and prevent needless tragedy by helping young people learn how to drive safely and responsibly. They often serve as role models for their students in many ways that go beyond driving safely,” said David Reich, of The National Road Safety Foundation and a member of the ADTSEA Board of Directors. “The teachers being honored with the Teacher Excellence Award have demonstrated impressive creativity and enthusiasm in the important work they do.”

Teacher of Excellence honoree **Raymond Kroll** has been teaching driver ed since 1966. He has also been a strong advocate for pupil transportation safety, having been coordinator of Minnesota’s school bus driver development program and serving three terms as president of the Minnesota Association for Pupil Transportation. As the newly-appointed Legislative Chair of the Minnesota Driver & Traffic Safety Education Association, he says he is pushing for the state to mandate that all 18 and 19 year-olds complete the requirements of the state’s enhanced GDL law.

Robert Droege, who has been teaching driver ed in St. Louis for five years, feels technology is a major factor in the quickly-changing role of drivers, presenting challenges and great opportunities for the driver education community. He notes that many students don’t understand the capabilities and the limitations of new driver assist technologies, and he has been working with his school district to enhance the use and the reality of classroom simulators. “Driver ed content is immediate and relevant for teenagers,” Droege said. “The information and activities in our classes can be immediately applied in the daily life of students, and I love seeing the ‘aha’ moment when students experience in real life a concept learned in class.”

Michael Ray Jones, Sr., has been teaching for 25 years in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools in North Carolina and has been a classroom and behind-the-wheel instructor for the Jordan Driving School since 2011. He serves as a mentor teacher for new instructors in the school's student teaching program. Jones would like to see state and national standards expanded so student drivers get more behind-the-wheel training. "Students need more in-car training with an instructor so they can become competent and skillful low-risk defensive drivers," he said.

Darin Bardal has been a driver ed instructor for 14 years in the West Fargo ND public schools. He utilizes a variety of resources to help make his students safer drivers, including collaborating with the West Fargo Police and the department's school resource officers. He brings in guest speakers to talk with his students about the challenges of peer pressure, to help them make smart decisions behind the wheel. "Darin's lessons and the use of outside resources make a lasting impact," said Nate Schleicher, assistant principal at Sheyenne High School in West Fargo.

Stanley Blicharz, a driver ed instructor in Vermont for 20 years, began teaching driving while coaching the local American Legion's baseball team, where he heard his players joke about reckless driving and getting speeding tickets. He knew he could make a difference, so he completed the requirements to become a driver ed teacher. "It was the best decision I ever made," he recalls. He became active in the Vermont Driver Training & Safety Education Association, where he served two terms as president. During his tenure, he helped convince the Vermont State Legislature not to move ahead with a plan to drop driver ed from the public schools. He is a strong proponent of parent involvement and has instituted mandatory parent-student meetings to gain parental buy-in to the importance of driver safety. He would like to see stronger support for driver education from businesses, state lawmakers and insurance companies, which would help people realize the serious need for improved driver education and would also encourage more young people to consider getting into the field.

"These teachers who are being honored represent the best, who inspire others to be passionate and effective teachers of this important life skill," said Rich Hanson, who heads the selection committee for ADTSEA. "We are proud to honor them as Teachers of Excellence."

The Teacher Excellence Awards, given by The National Road Safety Foundation, are named in memory of Dr. Francis Kenel, a traffic safety engineer, former director of the AAA, author of driver ed teacher training materials and a mentor to countless driver education instructors.

The American Driver and Traffic Safety Education is the professional association that represents traffic safety educators throughout the United States. As a national advocate for quality traffic safety education, the group creates and publishes policies and guidelines for driver ed and conducts conferences and workshops for teachers. It was instrumental in creating the new driver education curriculum standard issued recently by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The National Road Safety Foundation (NRSF), a non-profit organization, has supported ADTSEA's Teacher Excellence Awards program for ten years. For more than 55 years, NRSF has created driver education programs and materials for free distribution to teachers, police, traffic safety agencies, youth advocacy groups and others. NRSF has programs on distraction, speed and aggression, impairment and drowsy driving. The group also sponsors contests for teens in partnership with SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions), FCCLA and Scholastic, as well as regional teen contests in partnership with auto shows in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, DC. To view and download free programs and for more information, visit www.nrsf.org or www.teenlane.org.

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