

# High-tech 'teacher of the year' electrifies Park Junior High

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The showcase outside Jim Granger's classroom at Park Junior High School displays a collection of examples of technological progress which resemble Granger's own progress as a teacher.

A mark of Granger's success is his recent selection as the outstanding technology education teacher in Illinois for 1992. Granger, who has taught in District 102 for 29 years, has also written a new industrial technology curriculum, which is in place this year at Park.

Granger was honored at the Illinois Industrial Technology Education Association awards breakfast and annual meeting Feb. 20 in Itasca, and will receive ovations at the International Technology Education Association conference in Minneapolis on March 24. He will also receive the District's Medal of Recognition at the May School Board meeting.

Granger said that after he was nominated for the award (the IITEA does not disclose who made the nomination), he received a questionnaire and was then selected by an association committee. In a congratulatory letter, Doug Polette, ITEA teacher recognition chairman, said, "It is truly an exceptional accomplishment, and in a small measure repays you for all of the extra time and effort you have put forth through the years to receive such an

honor."

Some of that extra time and effort have recently gone into modernizing the curriculum, just like the steam locomotive, adding machine and typewriter in Granger's display case have been modernized into a diesel engine, calculator and computer.

Although the new curriculum, which is based on the Illinois Plan for Industrial Education, includes more modern technology than was used previously, it also offers a traditional, well-rounded education.

Granger said that, "Five years ago, there was not a program like this in the state."

His plan was approved by the School Board last May, and over the summer, Park's shop was completely remodeled to accommodate the new curriculum. Computers and a laser simulator "are probably two of the most showy [additions]," Granger said. Over half the \$20,000 requested to make the necessary changes has gone into computer and VCR equipment, software and educational videos.

The full curriculum has not been implemented yet, Granger said, due to delays in shipping the supplies. The laser simulator, for example, which allows students to focus and direct a beam of light to see how a real laser is used, did not arrive until November. Granger would like to use the computers more, but he is still waiting for some of the soft-

ware.

Traditionally in District 102 industrial arts classes, students worked individually on projects of their own choosing, ranging from a leather wrist band to a 16-foot flat-bottom canoe, he said. The new curriculum places more of an emphasis on in-class experimentation than on take-home projects. During the course of a quarter, each student must complete a five-part activity in each of four technology areas: energy, communication, transportation and construction. The hands-on project is only one-fifth of the activity, which includes advance planning, and writing up a procedure, report and bibliography.

The 3,000-square-foot room is full of equipment and project ideas. Granger says it is difficult to summarize the program; there are no typical projects. "It's the type of thing you've got to see rather than be told about," he said. But he was able to show off a few items: Sail and vehicle designs can be tested on a water trough and a magnetic levitation track; computer programs assist in designing architectural floor plans and in flight simulation.

Students can also do work with fiber optics. Granger described a "broadcasting" project where students write a script and learn how to transmit a program, including using a mixing device to do sound effects and voice-overs.



Park Junior High students Chris Chin, left, and Lauren Smetko, right, work with Jim Granger on an experiment in magnetic-levitation transportation systems. (Photo by Doug Bennington)

The shop has many possibilities for activity choices. Granger said, "As I tell my kids, their biggest problem here is making decisions."

Industrial technology is now a requirement for all seventh-graders at Park, where Granger has taught since the school was opened 15 years ago. Granger thinks it is an important class and should be a requirement everywhere. "It gives kids exposure to technical [skills and knowledge] and potential job opportunities," he said.

By requiring planning, research and direct application, his curriculum combines several areas of learning, like language arts, math, history and science. He said a parent commented, "This is the first time kids have had to put everything together." Granger got his bachelor's degree from Northern Illinois University, where he majored in industrial arts and minored in

math.

He has advanced degrees from Ball State University and Northern. In the 34 years he has taught, his students have ranged in age from fifth-graders to college seniors. He has also offered adult classes through the Park District for 13 years, although getting used to the new curriculum is preventing him from doing that this year.

Granger's concern for education extends beyond the classroom. He has been co-sponsor of Park's computer club for four years and is presently serving on the district's Technology Committee.

Granger, who lives three blocks from the school, said it is good to have lived in the same community for so long.

Some former students have gone into work directly related to what they learned in Granger's class. He said it is gratifying "to see it does make a difference."