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## Cape recognizes its top educators

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Four teachers from the City of Cape Coral Municipal Charter School System were awarded this week with Lighthouse Awards for acting as "Beacons for Educational Excellence."

Now in its second year, the Lighthouse Award program mirrors the much larger Golden Apple Teacher Recognition Award, yet it is designed specifically to recognize teachers in the city charter system. Even though the system is chartered within the Lee County School District, its teachers weren't included in the Golden Apples program.

On Tuesday the four winners - Susi Kelly, Kimberly Lucas, John Omundsen and Peter Ndiang'ui - were surprised in their classrooms by officials from the Municipal Charter School Foundation.

Each receive a handcrafted Waterford crystal lighthouse and are invited to the Lighthouse Awards Ceremony on May 20 at the Pavilion in Cape Harbour.

Kimberly Lucas, a second grade teacher at Oasis Charter Elementary, has been in the system for five years. She was a teacher at the Noonan Academy and Bobbie Noonan's Pre-School and Pre-K through 4th grade program before moving to the charter system.

Unfortunately, she was home Tuesday when the awards were being presented, but she was still surprised to be a winner.

"I was home, I hurt my neck and went to the chiropractor," she said. "I was very surprised but I was all alone."

Lucas teaches all of the subjects to her second grade class, but said language arts and writing is the one she enjoys the most.

"I really enjoy watching their writing grow throughout the year, they start from barely knowing how to write a complete sentence to writing two to three paragraphs at the end of the year," she said.

Outside of the regular school day, Lucas is active in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life event. She served as captain of the charter school's team and raised more than \$7,000 for the ACS. Both members of the faculty and students joined the team, she said.

Another winner, fifth grade teacher Susi Kelly, said her students were so excited they couldn't wait for a group hug.

"It took my breath away, and my kids attacked me and made me tear up," she said. "It was quite an honor to be recognized by my peers because I just love working with kids."

Kelly also was one of the first teachers hired at Christa McAuliffe Elementary. She was a teacher in the New York City School System and at Diplomat Elementary before coming aboard at Christa McAuliffe.

Social Studies is her favorite subject to teach because she can "build great citizens."

"There is so much you can do with Social Studies and draw them to look at the past," she said. "I work at making sure they learn the material in a way that increases their creativity and their higher-order thinking skills."

Oasis High geography teacher Peter Ndiang'ui has a lot of world experience to bring his classes. He was hired one year ago and teaches world geography and leadership skills development. Not unlike the other Lighthouse Award winners, he was shocked.

"I had no words. You can imagine a teacher in front of students and has nothing to say," he said.

Before accepting the award he had the foundation representatives ask the class if he has made a difference, because his first question was "Are you sure about this?" A native of Kenya, and a seasoned world traveler, Ndiang'ui strives to bring the reality of the world into his classroom.

Recently, his classes were learning about international trade, and Ndiang'ui had them study their own clothing, pens, jewelry or other items around the house to find out where in the world they came from.

"Then they came up with a report to say what they had and they used statistical analysis to see where America imports its goods from," he said. "One kid had an American flag made in China."

### Article Photos



MICHAEL PISTELLA  
 Oasis High teacher Peter Ndiang'ui gets a congratulatory hug from City of Cape Coral Municipal Charter School Foundation Board president Janet Deile after receiving a Lighthouse Award, Tuesday. The Lighthouse Award recognizes professional educators in the Cape Coral Charter School System for excellence. More photos are available online at: [cu.cape-coral-daily-breeze.com](http://cu.cape-coral-daily-breeze.com).

For the last seven years he was a teacher at the Canterbury School in Fort Myers and is hoping to receive his Doctorate in Education by 2013.

John Omundsen, a teacher at Oasis Middle for the last two years, is a former Lighthouse Educator of Distinction, another award given to runners-up for the Lighthouse Award. He teaches mathematics and sponsors the eighth grade math team.

"When they came in the other day I was in complete shock about it because I have only been teaching for two years," he said. "It was a great honor."

Teaching math can be challenging but Omundsen said he tries to make abstract mathematical concepts tangible.

"What I try to do is make math relevant to my students," he said. "I try to make it relevant and hands-on so they can understand the subject matter."

Some of his former students came to him at the end of the last school year and said they enjoyed math more than they did before, and even though it still isn't their favorite subject, he said it is a success for him.

Omundsen holds a masters degree from the University of Florida is pursuing a degree in education administration from UF starting this summer.

All four winners are attending the awards banquet on May 20 where they will officially receive the Lighthouse Award. The reception starts at 6:30 p.m. and the ceremony begins at 8 p.m. with Jason Gunter, a participant in the Ironman Triathlon World Championships, as guest speaker.

Other charter teachers also received Distinguished Educator Awards: Dawn Combs, Theresa Beuerle, Tiffany Drendall, Stacie Worley, Crystal Hanhurt, John Culhane and Barbara Jamison.

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