

KHS Physics Teacher Wins Princeton Award

Kearny High School Science teacher, John A. O'Hara, along with three other secondary school teachers in New Jersey, was the recipient of the "Princeton University Distinguished Teacher Award" presented during the 250th Commencement Exercise at Princeton University. The esteemed award is presented annually to four high school teachers from New Jersey in recognition of "fruitful teaching, devoted service, and human as well as professional qualities." Mr. O'Hara was nominated for the award by KHS principal Sal Valanzola and Science Department Chairman Michael Contreras.

This is the first time any teacher in the history of Kearny High School has been recognized at the commencement exercises at Princeton University. Three years ago, Mr. O'Hara introduced a new pedagogical method of instruction into the physics classroom called Corporation Physics - a new learning style that has as its foundation teamwork, collaborative learning, and student-centered responsibilities. The students are the primary learners, teachers, and doers in Corporation Physics.

Last year, Mr. O'Hara won the Best Practices Award from the NJ Department of Education for Corporation Physics. This year, he applied the very successful pedagogical methods of Corporation Physics to a new course-ITV Distance Learning Aerospace Science. In ITV Aerospace Science, four high schools in the county, Memorial North Bergen, Secaucus, and Kearny, receive instruction simultaneously through interactive television each day. After Mr. Valanzola nominated Mr. O'Hara for the award, Margaret Fels, PhD., from the Teacher Preparation Department at Princeton, spent an entire day in Kearny High School

observing Mr. O'Hara and the ITV Aerospace and Physics classes. She spoke with faculty and students about Corporation Physics and ITV Aerospace. A committee at Princeton read Ms. Fels's report along with 80 nominations from school districts throughout New Jersey, and selected Mr. O'Hara as an award recipient.

Mr. O'Hara and Mr. Valanzola were invited to spend the day at Princeton University. The recipients and their guests were escorted to the office of the president of the university, Dr. Harold Shapiro. He congratulated the winners and presented each with a certificate and a check for \$5,000.00. Each school district receives a \$2,500.00 gift. Following the presentation of the certificates, the award recipients were escorted to meet Provost Jeremiah Ostriker.

After meeting the Provost, the award winners put on their caps and gowns and processed with

the faculty and trustees of Princeton University to the dais.

Approximately 10,000 people attended the 250th commencement of Princeton University.

After the invocation, Provost Ostriker called the Distinguished Teacher Award winners to the dais where they were recognized for their contributions to education in the State of New Jersey. Provost Ostriker said "John O'Hara teaches physics and aerospace science at Kearny High School, where, because of his initiatives, 'the wild blue yonder' is just as much the new frontiers of computer technology as the horizons of an aircraft's flight. Through team approaches, he gives students the responsibility to teach each other, the confidence to have their ideas tested, and the opportunity to develop new skills as well as to stretch their strongest abilities."

Following Provost Ostriker's remarks, honorary degrees were conferred.

Mr. Valanzola and Mr. O'Hara, along with other guests, were invited to a reception and luncheon in their honor. During the luncheon, Mr. O'Hara and Mr. Valanzola spoke about the high school and about the successful ITV Aerospace and Corporation Physics program.



Princeton University Distinguished Teaching Award winner John O'Hara, of Kearny High School.