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TEACHERS FROM FIVE STATES CITED AS TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE BY THE NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY FOUNDATION AND AMERICAN DRIVER & TRAFFIC SAFETY EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

NEW YORK, June 23, 2022 -- Driver education teachers from Minnesota, Missouri, Vermont, Virginia and Washington have been selected by their peers nationwide as Teachers of Excellence. The honor, with a cash stipend, comes from the The National Road Safety Foundation and the American Driver & Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA).

The Teachers of Excellence for 2022 are Jennifer Sletten, who teaches in the Rothsay, MN public schools; Thomas Iffrig, a teacher in the Pattonville School District in Saint Ann, MO; Richard Kearney, who teaches at Woodstock Union High School in Woodstock, VT; JoEllen Suter, an online teacher for the Virginia Department of Education; and Alexander Hansen, who teaches in the Eatonville School District in Eatonville, WA.

Teacher of Excellence honoree **Jennifer Sletten** has taught driver education in Minnesota since 2012, in Fergus Falls and Rothsay, VA, where she also teaches business and social studies. A board member of ADTSEA and past president of the Minnesota Driver & Traffic Safety Education Association, she recalls the pain of close family members being seriously injured or killed in crashes, which made her want to help prevent others from experiencing trauma “due to making bad decisions with a motor vehicle.” Around the time of a crash where one of her brothers almost died after being thrown from a car that rolled over when the driver, high on drugs, lost control, she saw her school district was looking for a driver education teacher and she began the certification process. “A challenge facing driver education teachers today,” she said, “is the need to keep up with new car technology and incorporate it into what we teach our students.”

Thomas Iffrig had been teaching physical education and health in Pattonville, MO for 12 years and wanted to change to an area where he felt he could make more of an impact on the lives of his students. Since becoming involved in traffic safety education in 2007, he said he’s poured his heart into becoming a better driver education teacher, attending conferences and taking courses. He also now teaches as a part-time driving instructor in a neighboring school district. He’s brought many innovations in driver instruction to his schools, teaching about new technology in cars and also using simulators. He encourages his students to be active in community service, leading by example with his involvement in the annual Seat Belt Challenge in Pattonville.

Richard Kearney teaches driver education at Woodstock Union High School in Woodstock, VT. He also owns the Upper Valley Driving Academy in nearby Newbury. He began teaching driver education in 2014, after nearly 30 years in law enforcement in Massachusetts and Vermont. “During my tenure as

a police officer," he recalled, "I embraced the community policing concept in its infancy and established one of the first school resource officer positions in the state. At the end of my criminal justice career, I revisited the idea of education as a second career and there's been no looking back." Kearney, a past president of the Vermont Driver Training and Education Association, sees technology as both a big challenge and a big opportunity facing driver educators. "Educators need to adopt and embrace technology in the classroom to deliver fresh content to Generation Z students," he said, "while keeping up with new automotive technologies to properly educate the student drivers of tomorrow."

JoEllen Suter has been teaching driver education since 1979 in the Prince William County (VA) public schools, and since 2004 has also been an online driver education trainer of teachers for the Virginia Department of Education. She served as president of the Virginia Association for Driver Education and Traffic Safety and also served several years on the Board of ADTSEA. "Driver and traffic safety education is an important life skill, where a mistake can cost a life," she said. She feels more emphasis should be placed on recruiting and training good driver education teachers. "The opportunities to promote careers in driver and traffic safety education are out there, but the safety community must take the first step by making a solid plan of action to bring people in."

Alexander Hansen has been teaching driver education in Washington public schools including at the Eatonville Public Schools for 20 years and at Defensive Driving School in Seattle for more than 30 years. He also has spent summers since 2008 teaching courses for driver education certification at Central Washington University. He is a past president of the Washington Traffic Safety Education Association. One of his passions is getting parents involved in the traffic safety education process. He's developed a parent handbook, a parental involvement guide for teachers, a behind-the-wheel parent practice guide and a Powerpoint presentation that traffic safety educators use in parent involvement sessions.

"These outstanding teachers we are recognizing represent our best, and they inspire their peers to be passionate and effective teachers of this important life skill," said Harold Fleming, a past ADTSEA president who heads the selection committee. "We are proud to honor them as the 2022 Teachers of Excellence."

All five Teachers of Excellence will be honored this July at the ADTSEA national conference in Vancouver, WA, where they will present innovative lesson plans to their peers.

"Driver education teachers are dedicated to the young people they serve and often serve as role models in ways that go far beyond driver training," said David Reich of The National Road Safety Foundation and a member of the ADTSEA Board of Directors. "These Teachers of Excellence have demonstrated true passion for the important work they do to make driving safely a lifelong experience."

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 60 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 Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, DC. To view and download free programs and for more information, visit www.nrsf.org.

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