

Keen: Teaching 'a neat experience'

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A product of Columbia County schools, Sherod Keen was named 2013 Columbia County Teacher of the Year Thursday evening.

"I'm honored. It's such a blessing," said Keen, band director at Richardson Middle School for five years.

Keen was among 14 teachers nominated by their peers to receive the award. Each nominee received \$250 from the school board, a crystal apple and a framed certificate during a program and reception at the First Presbyterian Church.

They also received gift bags of items donated by community businesses.

"He's just a fine, Christian young man," said Imogene Miller, a retired Columbia County teacher and 1990

Teacher of the Year. Miller was Keen's elementary music teacher. She once visited Keen's classroom and said the students were disciplined and interested. "He's very concerned about every child," she said.

"It's a neat experience," said Keen of teaching in an area where he was once a student. "A lot of times I think about what it was like for me."

Keen said students respect him because he takes a personal interest in their lives and doesn't talk down to them. "I show that I care. I'm friendly."

Keen said he likes to joke around with his students, but counters that with hard work. "I'm pretty strict. In order to have a good product you have to do that."

Principal Bessie Whitfield said it is amazing how much Keen can teach students, some who have never picked up an instrument, in just a few months.

Keen's bands have won district and regional awards, she said. Band is a popular class at Richardson and often there are more requests for the class than seats, she said.

Keen was a student at Fort WHigh School while Whitfield was an assistant principal. "It's amazing seeing

him go from band member to band director," she said.

Whitfield said Raymond Macatee, who passed away in January, would

have been proud. He worked hard to provide students with instruments through his Scrap to Music program, she said. He gave many students at Richardson, a Title 1 school, a chance to play in the band. "We are dearly going to miss him."

Many of Keen's fellow Richardson teachers attended the program to show support.

Former students that are now in high school sometimes return to play under Keen's direction during middle school football games, said Cricket Morgan, a sixth grade teacher at Richardson. Cindy Jarrell, a sixth grade teacher, said Keen has an energetic and positive attitude.

Alvin Davis, 2012 Florida Teacher of the Year, gave a keynote speech encouraging teachers to do their best. "Educators are nation builders," Davis said. "Our children only deserve the best and brightest."

Keen said he appreciated the supportive staff, faculty and administrative members who nominated him and ensured he has what he needs in his classroom.

Trevor Tyler, 2012 Teacher of the Year, said Keen treats all students with respect and former students think highly of him. His ability to touch his students'

lives made Keen stand out from other nominees, Tyler said.

Tyler served on the Teacher of the Year selection committee along with

Dottie Knight, of Columbia Public Schools Foundation; Betty Sauls, middle level Columbia Teachers Association representative; Debbie Harris, elementary level CTA representative;

Kitty McElhaney, director of curriculum, assessment and accountability;

Celeste Levy, community member; Ronnie Brannon, county tax collector; Alvin Murphy, retired teacher; and Steve Nelson, school board chairman