

## **Ag foundation names Kansas principal teacher of the year**

**MANHATTAN, Kan. – Oct. 7, 2015** – Ray Huff, the principal at Service Valley Charter Academy (SVCA) in Parsons, Kan., was recently named the 2016 Janet Sims Memorial Teacher of the Year by the Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (KFAC).

The KFAC Janet Sims Memorial Teacher of the Year award recognizes Kansas teachers who instill a passion for learning about agriculture within their students. The Foundation honors one teacher annually who has successfully integrated agricultural education into his or her pre-existing curriculum. Huff will be honored with the award at the Bookmark Art and Teacher of the Year celebration during Kansas Ag Month in March 2016 in Topeka.

Huff has always loved the outdoors. As an eighth generation farmer, nature and agriculture are engrained in everything Huff does, including his work as an educator.

“I’ve always gravitated towards the outdoors in my personal life,” said Huff. “I am a much better teacher when I am teaching something I’m passionate about; it just makes sense to implement agriculture in our classrooms at SVCA.”

As the administrator for SVCA, Huff leads the charge to ensure all teachers are working together to incorporate agriculture in their classrooms. During weekly staff meetings, an hour is dedicated to discussing their agriculture and environmental curriculum. Teachers also have the opportunity to brainstorm, ask questions and do individual research on agriculture topics they may not be familiar with.

“When you are planning to incorporate ag education into your school’s curriculum, it’s important to realize that most people are not raised on a farm and this can create some resistance,” said Huff. “Allowing teachers time to observe and discuss agriculture topics can help alleviate those fears and empower them; we are very fortunate to have a staff willing to get their hands dirty.”

In addition to serving as the principal for SVCA, Huff also spends time teaching in the classroom. Each day he works with students during Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), where they focus on specific subjects or projects.

For younger grades, Huff focuses on agriculture vocabulary words, allowing students to understand from an early age, terms commonly used in agriculture. Over the past year, students in grades six through eight focused on building a pond on school grounds through a collaborative effort with the local Farm Service Agency (FSA), school board and volunteers.

Outside of MTSS time, all students participate in a one-acre prairie restoration project. Students spread the grass seed by hand and mimicked buffalo hooves by

using the heels of their boots to drive the seed into the ground. They've been able to observe quail, snakes and other animals over the past two years. Next spring they will engage the local fire department to burn the prairie grasses to allow for reestablishment.

Huff recognizes the importance of providing these hands-on learning environments and opportunities for his students and says that allowing them to get dirty and be outside only enhances their learning.

"We have a generation of kids who are used to being inside, even when they attend school," said Huff. "That's why ag and environmental education is so important; in our school I've often thought of ag in the classroom as ag *outside* of the classroom."

Outside of school hours, Huff is still highly involved with agriculture, farming with his father. They utilize no-till farming methods to grow corn, wheat and soybeans.

Huff's passion for habitat improvement has allowed him to collaborate with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks on their farm in a prairie restoration and quail habitat project.

"One of my long-term goals in ag education is to educate not only youth but also current farmers on restoration and habitat improvement," Huff said. "I believe there is a balance and a connection between ag production and our environment."

Huff and his wife, Ashka, have two children, Max and Kaja. Outside of conventional farm crops, Huff's family also gardens.

"Ashka's family is originally from Poland and are outstanding gardeners," said Huff. "I've learned a lot from them over the years and it really brings into perspective that agriculture and environmental education really is a global interest."

Huff credits his parents and grandparents for his combined passions of agriculture and education. Watching and helping his dad and grandpa on the farm, Huff learned the value of a good work ethic and an understanding of what it means to be responsible for the land and the crops grown in it.

"I grew up in my grandpa's back pocket," commented Huff. "He used to tell stories of picking 80 acres of corn by hand and the methods of farming used in the early 1900s."

His grandmother's love for education permeated everything and everyone she came in contact with.

"My grandma had a true love for education and she passed that down to each of her kids and grandkids," said Huff. "Every one of us has ended up in education in one form or another."

As KFAC's Teacher of the Year, Huff will have the opportunity to attend the National Agriculture in the Classroom (NAITC) conference, which will be held in Phoenix, Ariz., June 2016. High Plains Journal and AG am in Kansas will sponsor his trip.

The Janet Sims Memorial Teacher of the Year award is named in honor of Janet Sims, who passed away in June 2007 from Lou Gehrig's disease. Sims, an educator herself, had served on the KFAC board from November 2005 until her death.

**About Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom**

The Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (KFAC) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. KFAC was founded in 1982 as part of a nationwide initiative to help students gain a greater awareness of the role of agriculture in the economy and society, so that they may become citizens who support wise agricultural policies. For more information, visit [www.ksagclassroom.org](http://www.ksagclassroom.org) or phone (785) 320-4350.

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