EPHS technology teacher wins $50,000 national teaching prize

Sheila Stalberger recognized for boosting female enrollment in trades

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An industrial technology teacher at Eden Prairie High School has been awarded a $50,000 national teaching prize for her dedication to skilled trades education.

Stalberger is one of only 25 winners across the nation of the 2025 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence.

Staff and students held a surprise ceremony for her at the school campus and presented her with a $50,000 check. Eden Prairie High School's skilled trades program received $35,000 and Stalberger received $15,000.

Harbor Freight Tools for Schools awarded a total of $1.5 million in prizes to 25 skilled trades teachers across the nation.

"The biggest reason I was applying for the prize was because I really desired to buy some new automated equipment for our area to try to move closer to industry standards," Stalberger said. "It's hard for schools to stay constantly up to date on the way technology changes, so there's a few pieces where I really am excited about them, but they cost a lot of money."

Throughout her time teaching the course at Eden Prairie High School, the number of female students enrolled in wood courses has increased by a third. General enrollment rates in her course and the number of graduates of her program entering the trades have also increased by 20%, according to a media advisory from Eden Prairie Schools.

A pre-recorded message from U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar (DFL-MN) was played at the surprise ceremony, congratulating Stalberger on her success in securing the prize and recognizing her teaching excellence.

Students January Cook and Yuliana Centeno Cortes both spoke at the event, emphasizing the effort that Stalberger puts into ensuring that her female students feel empowered to join her course and others similar to it.

Superintendent of Eden Prairie Schools Dr. Josh Swanson was unable to attend the ceremony, but recorded a congratulatory video message. Dr. Jaysen Anderson, principal of Eden Prairie High School, gave a speech at the event, praising Stalberger for her hard work and dedication to her students.

"It was very reaffirming to see that after this many years, I'm really making a difference and these kids like what I'm doing and they're there to support me as well," Stalberger said.

SHEILA STALBERGER

Stalberger teaches intro to woodcrafting, intermediate wood custom design, and capstone advanced wood crafting in the industrial technology program at Eden Prairie High School. Under Stalberger's leadership, community partnerships have expanded; the number of female students enrolled in wood courses has increased and students have been well-connected to apprenticeships, certifications and careers, according to a media advisory from Eden Prairie Schools.

TEACHING EXCELLENCE

More than $10 million in prizes have been awarded to over 180 teachers and their programs since 2017. This year's prize had over 1,000 applicants. The application process involved an independent panel of experts from education, nonprofits, industry and philanthropy conducting three rounds of judging. Stalberger is the only 2025 Minnesotan winner. This year's prize was awarded to winners across 18 states.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

The Harbor Freight Tools for Schools is a Smidt Foundation program aims to help people gain a better understanding of the field. Providing high school students with access to quality skilled trades education acts as a pathway to graduation, solid jobs and opportunities. Info: HFTforschools.org











(SUN PHOTOS BY NATALIE TRIMBLE)

TOP LEFT: Sheila Stalberger hugs her husband Clinton Stalberger while surrounded by her mother Nora Sexton (left) and sister-in-law Carrie Zuchowski (right) at the surprise ceremony on Sept. 30. **TOP RIGHT:** Sheila Stalberger excitedly poses with her $50,000 check. **CENTER LEFT:** Eden Prairie High School students pose for a photo with Sheila Stalberger after the ceremony. **ABOVE:** From left: Family members Carrie Zuchowski, Clinton Stalberger, Sheila Stalberger, Nora Sexton and Ron Sexton pose for a photo with the $50,000 check. **LEFT:** Eden Prairie High School students January Cook and Yuliana Centeno Cortes give a speech at the surprise ceremony.