

Kapolei teacher keeps students on their toes

BY EMILY VIGLIELMO

Kapolei Middle School teacher Tracy Taylor makes sure that his students start out on the right foot. Sometimes, however, he may have them lead with their left — depending on which dance they're learning.

Taylor, who teaches social and popular dance as an elective, has been named the Department of Education's Leeward Oahu District Teacher of the Year.

"I think it's wonderful," Taylor said of the accolade. "It's the first time I've been recognized for something like this — singled out for a pat on the back. I wish all teachers could feel this way."

Each district finalist is entitled to the year-long use of a vehicle. Taylor has not picked up his car from Cutter Mitsubishi yet, but he did receive a \$500 check from the Polynesian Cultural Center at an Oct. 21 ceremony, just as the other winners did.

The finalists also receive free meals from Ruby Tuesday in the Town Center of Mililani.

As for the money and how he will use it, Taylor sighed and momentarily pondered. "I really haven't thought about any of that yet," he answered.

For now, Taylor is busy just trying to stay in step with his students. He said he gets kidded about dance not being academically challenging but believes, "My class is not an easy class."

Not only must the students master the waltz, box step, swing, cha-cha, polka, salsa, merengue and tango, but they must teach the intricate dances to their parents. "They have responsibilities," Taylor said.

The students also learn everything about planning parties — from sending out invitations, choosing a theme and reserving the room, to the set-up and clean-up of the venue, and even which games to play at the soiree.

When everything has been arranged, they throw a dance for their parents, Taylor said. "That's scary," said the award-winning teacher. "At that age, the parent/child relationship is different."



Emily Viglielmo photos

Shall we dance? Above left, Celene Kalima and Brandon Tabieros practice their dance form in Tracy Taylor's class at Kapolei Middle School. Taylor was recently named the DOE's Leeward Oahu District Teacher of the Year. Above right, Marcus Nahoi and Briana Afoa move across the floor with ease.

Eighth-grader Celene Kalima has been taking Taylor's class for nearly three years. "He's really

good at teaching because he brings himself down to our level," Kalima said. "It's not like

any other class. We do work, but we dance and have fun."

Sixth-grader Briana Afoa,

who's only been taking Taylor's course for a few weeks, said it used to be "shame" to dance in front of people you don't know, but "he teaches us to perform and not to fear it."



Tracy Taylor

Kapolei Middle School Principal Annette Nishikawa helped to nominate Taylor for the prestigious award. "And we don't nominate anyone unless we feel their work is superior," she said.

Parental response to the organized dances has been absolutely positive, Nishikawa said. "The dances are held during the day. It's clean stuff," Nishikawa said. "It shows that the kids learn something other than what they see on MTV."

Taylor agreed that there's "nothing sexually suggestive" in his dances, and that moving around the floor instructs kids on a lot more than how to put one foot in front of the other.

"He not only teaches the dances, he integrates reading and writing activities into his classes," Nishikawa explained. "The students can learn that there is a purpose to what they learn in their core classes."