

Poughkeepsie, NY
July 5, 2009
Circulation: 41,690
Online circulation: 132,841 visitors/month



Soon-to be teacher gets fellowship

Foundation officer: Millbrook woman 'knew her science'

by Anthony P. Musso | For the Poughkeepsie Journal

MILLBROOK -Rebecca Van Tassell was recently selected as one of 35 future teachers nationwide to receive a 2009 Knowles Science Teaching Foundation Fellowship.

Born and raised in Millbrook and a 2004 graduate of its high school, Van Tassell earned a degree in plant science from Cornell University in 2008.

Van Tassell said her interest in biology was influenced by her experiences growing up on her family's dairy farm.

"It obviously had a huge impact on the way I think about the world," she said. "I always knew that I would study science and that's certainly a direct link from growing up on the farm."

Her decision to pursue a career in teaching came after Van Tassell took a course in education at Cornell.

"As an undergraduate, I was a plant science major and thought I would eventually go on to research and be a scientist," she said. "One of the classes I took was on the sociology of education and the public education system and I loved it. I thought that I could do a lot of things in that field and it seemed like a challenging and interesting one to go into."

Nicole Gillespie, senior program officer for Knowles Science Teaching Foundation, said the foundation received 250 applications for this year's fellowships. They selected the 35 winners from a group of 72 finalists.

Worked as volunteer

Van Tassell "knew her science extremely well and she's also displayed a commitment towards working with students," Gillespie said. "Based on her volunteer work in classrooms and working with gifted and younger kids, it was clear to us that she is committed to being a teacher."

Founded in 1999, the New Jersey-based Knowles Science Teaching Foundation is a national advocate for improving the quality of science and mathematics teaching in U.S. high schools. Since 2002 it has awarded annual teaching fellowships worth up to \$150,000 over five years to exceptional early career teachers committed to making an impact in science and mathematics education.

"I'm incredibly grateful to be part of this program," Van Tassell said. "It's going to have a tremendous impact on my career as an educator and the opportunities that they are going to give me for my personal growth and my professional development are experiences I wouldn't be able to get anywhere else."

Van Tassell recently completed studies at Indiana University and will begin teaching biology and environmental science at Herron High School in Indianapolis, Ind., in September.