Another Calgary teacher wins national Innovation in Geography Teaching award

Ottawa, November 8, 2017 — Can Grade 2 students make a difference in the world? If you’re in Paula Huddy-Zubkowski’s class you’ll learn that everyday actions can have positive environmental results. Her dynamic approach to geography teaching has earned Huddy-Zubkowski the Royal Canadian Geographical Society’s (RCGS) Innovation in Geography Teaching Award. Huddy-Zubkowski teaches at Saint Joseph’s School in Calgary, making this the second year in a row that a teacher from Calgary has won this coveted award.

“Receiving this award from Canadian Geographic Education is a tremendous honor,” says Huddy-Zubkowski. “Diving deeply into connections between the land and people in this vast and beautiful country has become an integral component of my teaching. I look forward to continuing to inspire students to think, and explore, beyond the walls of a classroom.”

Huddy-Zubkowski uses an inclusive Indigenous Education Model in her classroom, with cutting edge teaching tools and programs that make learning about geography and environmental stewardship fun. Her students have worked on Bio Blitzs and Geocaching projects with University of Calgary researchers to learn about Calgary’s geography and environment. They’ve fundraised for a school composting program and were awarded the Jack Leslie Youth Environmental Grant by Mayor Naheed Nenshi and The City of Calgary. Through programs like the Classroom Energy Diet Challenge and tools like Canadian Geographic Giant Floor Maps, her students gained a better understanding of Earth’s ecosystems, natural resources, and conservation. On virtual fieldtrips, her class learned how to map polar bears habitats, and then created their own rap video, called Ice Bear Baby, to share ideas on what people can do to help polar bears thrive in the wild. In June 2017, Huddy-Zubkowski was selected from 5,000 applicants to participate on the Canada C3 or “Coast to Coast to Coast” expedition. She was on the inaugural leg of the trip from Toronto to Montreal and used social media to share her adventure with her students, Canadians, and the world. That same month, this trailblazing teacher was named National Geographic Educator of the Week for helping her students to understand and spread the message about the impact of climate change on polar bears.

Now, she is the recipient of Canada’s top K-12 geography teaching award, given to educators who go above and beyond to foster geographic engagement and promote geographic literacy. For Connie Wyatt Anderson, chair of Canadian Geographic Education, Huddy-Zubkowski was an obvious choice for the award. “Paula empowers her students to ask tough questions, connects them with university scientists, Blackfoot elders, and explorers to answer their questions and help them take action. Canada is a better place because of teachers like Paula.”

This award recognizes the recipient’s achievements with a medal and $2,500, split evenly between the recipient and a donation to support geographic education in their name. Huddy-Zubkowski will donate $1,250 to Exploring By The Seat of Your Pants, which has helped engage her Grade 2 students in learning about conservation, science and exploration. Alex Trebek, the famed celebrity host of the popular game show Jeopardy! and honorary president of the RCGS, will present Huddy-Zubkowski with the Innovation in Geography Teaching Award at a medal ceremony on November 16. The ceremony precedes the RCGS College of Fellows dinner taking place at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, across from Parliament Hill.

Media information:
Deborah Chapman, Communications Manager
Royal Canadian Geographical Society
O (613) 613-745-4629 ext. 160 C (613) 299-8995

- 30 -