

A National Leader In Teaching Excellence

By Karen Saatkamp Gerboth

Excerpts taken from Wittenberg Magazine Winter 2002

When Robert Welker was named the 2001 Ohio Professor of the Year, he joined a distinguished group of teaching greats at Wittenberg. Four times in the last 15 years, Wittenberg has claimed Ohio's top professor, making it the all-time leader in the Buckeye state and among the leaders nationwide.

But Welker, a professor of education since 1987, didn't boast about his latest achievement. He didn't call everyone in the state to share the news. In fact, he didn't even attend the award ceremony in Washington, D.C. Instead, he stayed on campus to do what he does best – teach.

Discover Robert Welker, a family man who brings out the best in students, colleagues and educators across the country and close to home, as he follows in the footsteps of Wittenberg's finest.

Robert Welker tosses a piece of yellow chalk in the air as he waits for his students to arrive. His burgundy button-down shirt paired with light khaki pants reflects his calm demeanor and the casual atmosphere in Blair 208, where child-drawn pictures and colorful creations circle the room.

Within minutes, one student walks in, followed by three more, then two, and soon the wood-floored room fills with fourteen future teachers, all of whom eventually fix their eyes on Welker, the father of four, friend, educator, colleague, and now the prestigious 2001 Ohio Professor of the Year.

"One person in our family who can't cry is my wife because when she does, we all start crying," he tells the students seated in a U-shape in an attempt to relate his personal experience with sympathy, the key topic of today's Moral Education class.

Such personal stories not only reveal more about Welker himself but also characterize his teaching style, a style that regularly challenges students to see education in all of its social contexts. "His dedication to his craft, his ability to lead his students to a deeper engagement with social issues at the heart of education and his genuine concern for individuals as people and future professionals, made him not only my adviser, but also my mentor," writes Melissa Stull '94 in her recommendation for the Ohio Professor of the Year award.

"There was a point several years ago when I made a determination that I was going to do what I loved," and "to make that choice reaffirmed how much teaching means to me. I stopped working for a living long ago."