

Landscape Teacher Wins \$100K Harbor Freight Prize

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Today, a landscape operations teacher from Stuart, FL has been awarded First Place in the 2019 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence. Wendy Schepman, who teaches [landscape operations and agriculture mechanics at South Fork High School in Stuart](#), has earned her high school skilled trades program \$70,000 as part of \$1 million awarded nationally by Harbor Freight Tools.



Wendy Schepman

Teacher, Landscape Operations and
Agriculture Mechanics
South Fork High School
Stuart, FL

Schepman was surprised in her classroom on October 24, 2019 by a representative from Harbor Freight Tools for Schools with the news that she and her school will receive \$100,000 – \$70,000 for the school's skilled trades program and \$30,000 for her personally.

"Skilled trades educators are crucial to helping students stay engaged and motivated in high school," said Danny Corwin, executive director of Harbor Freight Tools for Schools. "These amazing teachers connect students to promising careers, show them how to apply academics to the real world and help them feel pride and accomplishment – something they might not experience in all their classes. We make these awards because we believe in these teachers, we believe in these students, and we believe this vital sector deserves more support and investment."

Two other \$100,000 first place prizes have been awarded to Cesar Gutierrez, a precision manufacturing teacher at Desert View High School in Tucson, AZ and Brent Trankler, a welding instructor at Sikeston Career and Technology Center in Sikeston, MO. Each of the 15 second place winners, hailing from across the United States, were also surprised with the news they and their schools will receive \$50,000. In addition to the more than \$1 million in first place and second place prizes awarded by Harbor Freight Tools for Schools, the company Harbor Freight Tools has donated \$32,000 to 32 semifinalists.

The Prize for Teaching Excellence was started in 2017 by Harbor Freight Tools Founder Eric Smidt to recognize extraordinary public high school skilled trades teachers and programs. Prizes are awarded by Harbor Freight Tools for Schools, a program of The Smidt Foundation.

"All of our roads and bridges, our schools and homes, and our planes and automobiles are built and are maintained by tradespeople," Smidt points out. "It is our dedicated skilled trades teachers, who inspire students to pursue these meaningful careers, that allow our economy to thrive and make so much of what we depend on possible. We are deeply honored to be able to shine a light on these extraordinary teachers today."

First Place Winner Teaches Agriculture And Horticulture

In Stuart, FL, Wendy Schepman offers her students a broad curriculum, teaching general agriculture and horticulture principles before moving on to design, installation, maintenance, and mechanics and offering 18 dual-articulated college credits throughout the program.

The work comes to life thanks to her unique classroom: rather than a shop with four walls, Schepman's classroom spreads across 75 acres and includes a three-hole golf course maintained by students, a workshop, an equipment barn, a nursery, and an orchard. In a county with more than 160 golf courses, Schepman ensures her students have the skills to find career opportunities

close to home.



Wendy Schepman (Photo: South Fork High School)

"This is why I love teaching agriculture," she said. "I can incorporate all of my favorite things into one class and still be outside all day."

Schepman, who grew up on her family's small farm and was the only woman in her college's turfgrass science major, has been a teacher for seven years, taking over for her own former trades teacher at South Fork High School when he retired. Her lifetime of experience in and near Stuart has helped her develop close industry and alumni networks to benefit her students.

But before that, Schepman's first goal is to keep students coming to school.

"My students often tell me that my class is the only reason they came that day," Schepman said. "If I make my class interesting enough that they never want to miss a day, they will subsequently end up going to more of their other classes such as English or math, which are needed to graduate."

Schepman was a semifinalist for the 2018 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence.

Here is video from WPTV this morning, showing Schepman learning she is a winner:

<https://www.wptv.com/news/region-martin-county/stuart/south-fork-high-school-teacher-surprised-with-100-000>



Landscape operations teacher Wendy Schepman receives first place in the 2019 Harbor Freight Tools for Schools Prize for Teaching Excellence. (Photo: Saul Martinez)

The school's prize winnings will support the skilled trades program being recognized, and the teacher's or teacher team winnings can be used as they wish. The high schools of the remaining 32 semifinalists will each receive a \$1,000 Harbor Freight Tools gift card to support their skilled trades programs.

For a list of the 15 second place winners and the list of semifinalists, [click here](#).

The 2019 prize drew nearly 750 applications from 49 states and included three rounds of judging, each by a separate independent panel of experts from industry, education, trades, philanthropy and civic leadership. The field was narrowed this summer to 50 semifinalists. The application process, which included responses to questions and a series of online video learning modules, was designed to solicit each teacher's experience, insights and creative ideas about their approach to teaching and success in helping their students achieve excellence in the skilled trades. All learning modules [are available here](#).