

Strickler Wins Bernhardt Award at SWOSU

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Steve Strickler (middle) won the Bernhardt Academic Excellence Award at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford. The award for exceptional achievement in teaching, scholarship and service is made possible by Dr. William and Theta Juan Bernhardt who surround Strickler.

Bernhardt family members and SWOSU President John Hays (far right) congratulate Steve Strickler (second from right) for winning the Bernhardt Academic Excellence Award at SWOSU. Family members (from left) are Michel Bernhardt Cross, Valerie Bernhardt Lorenz, Dr. William Bernhardt and Theta Juan Bernhardt.

Steve Strickler won the Bernhardt Academic Excellence Award Thursday night (March 29) at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

Strickler, an instructor in the SWOSU Department of Communication and Theatre, won the prestigious award at a banquet held in the Memorial Student Center Union on the SWOSU campus. For winning the award, Strickler received a \$2,500 cash award, Waterford crystal clock and engraved pen set.

SWOSU alumni Dr. William and Theta Juan Bernhardt of Midwest City are sponsors of the annual award that goes to an outstanding faculty member who exhibits exceptional achievement in teaching, scholarship and service.

Guest speaker for the banquet was educator Michel Bernhardt Cross, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Bernhardt.

Steve Strickler has directed 37 theatrical productions for SWOSU in 15 years. Twenty-one of the productions have been entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) and nine have been nominated to advance to the regional festival with four of them advancing.

Strickler has received numerous awards through KCACTF. Two of the most prestigious were the Gold Medallion for Service and the Region VI KCACTF Faculty Fellow—which earned him a trip to the Kennedy Center with only three other directors from the United States.

Equally exciting for Strickler has been seeing three of his students advance to the National Theatre Festival, one who won the National Sound Design Award.

He has been actively involved on state and regional committees. He recently served as the Oklahoma chair and vice-chair for the KCACTF. Through this position, he chaired panels with the Oklahoma Speech Theatre Communication Association (OSTCA) and has served on the executive committee.

“I have told my students many times, ‘you have to be happy doing what you are doing; otherwise, everyone suffers,’” Strickler said. “I truly can say that I love what I am doing and that it has brought me much happiness.”

Strickler has served the university through many committees and projects: Miss Southwestern Board, Panorama Committee, Student Center Policy Forming Board, Board of Regents Transfer Curriculum Committee, Advisory Committee for the Southwestern-Colony Project, faculty sponsor of Alpha Psi Omega and Freshman Orientation instructor.

Strickler was instrumental in creating the Communication Arts degree at SWOSU. The change in degree-plan has increased the number of majors from 20 to over 180, which has most recently brought about the creation of the Department of Communication and Theatre.

As for community affairs, Strickler is a member of the First United Methodist Church where he is on the Worship Committee and the Wesley Center Foundation Board (Alumni Relations sub-committee). He is a long-time member of the Weatherford Arts Council and is an active teacher for the WAC Arts Academy.

Strickler graduated from SWOSU in 1988 with a Bachelor of Arts in speech/theatre education. After graduating, he accepted a graduate teaching assistantship with the theatre department at Oklahoma State University. The opportunity allowed him the experience of teaching a collegiate-level course, which led to his newfound passion.

He married Molly Wyatt, who passed away in 1998 after a very long illness. Their first home was in Stillwater while they finished their degrees. Strickler graduated with a Master of Arts in speech/theatre in 1990.

A year later, the Stricklers moved to Moberly, Missouri, where he taught at Moberly Area Community College. One year later, he was informed of an opening at SWOSU. His dream was to return to SWOSU.

“That was one of the most nerve-wracking interviews I have ever experienced,” Strickler said. “Many of the professors from my undergraduate education interviewed me. I wanted them to believe that I had learned something and that I deserved to join forces at SWOSU—which somehow happened in the fall semester of 1992.”

In 1999, Strickler married SWOSU alumna Laci Osmus. In true theatrical fashion, they were married on the Old Science Auditorium stage. The highlight of his life was the day that their daughter, Hannah Grace, was born.

Previous winners of the Bernhardt Award are (in order by year): Dr. Vilas Prabhu, Dr. Stuart Burchett, Dr. Gary Wolgamott, Dr. Terry Segress, Dr. James Hunsicker, Dr. Jill Jones, Dr. James Breckenridge, Dr. John Ludrick, Dr. W. Steven Pray, Dr. Les Crall, Dr. Peter Grant, Dr. John Hayden and Dr. Virgil Van Dusen.