



Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation

Contact: Judi Shellenberger (315) 258-0090
Rosalyn Queen Alonso (304) 842-2662

Embargoed until May 5, 2009

NATIONAL FREIDA J. RILEY TEACHER AWARD® WINNER ANNOUNCED

Harrison County, WV, May 5, 2009 – The tenth annual *Freida J. Riley Teacher Award*® will be presented to Alan Bronstein, science teacher at Central High School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at a dinner award ceremony on Tuesday, May 5, at the Village Square Conference Center Ballroom, in Harrison County, WV.

The award honors an American teacher who works with a physical disability, teaches in an especially challenging educational environment or has performed a heroic act by making an exceptional, personal or physical sacrifice on behalf of students. The \$10,000 prize is sponsored by the Christopher Columbus Foundation, a Federal government agency, in partnership with the West Virginia Freida J. Riley Teacher Award Committee, Harrison County, West Virginia.

Paralyzed from the chest down in an auto accident, Alan has overcome many challenges. Selling his business and choosing to relocate to Philadelphia after his rehabilitation, Alan then focused on a new career choice. He chose to return to teaching, which he had done briefly after college. Upon presentation of his Masters degree, he was surprised when his college gave him special recognition for “overcoming adversity.” Rather, Alan viewed it as “doing what had to be done and doing what makes life worth living” not “overcoming adversity.”

Alan has the gift of making science come alive to his students and peers alike by incorporating real-life situations into his science classes, thus making the lessons both relevant and memorable. He loves to create “the look of wonder on the faces of fellow teachers and students – then I know I’m doing what science is supposed to do for people: amaze them and make them wonder; arouse their curiosity (the ‘wow’ factor)!”

Alan’s love of science and life are evident in how he spends his time—as a tutor or mentor to students, on collaborative projects with students in summer college courses, as a mentor to teachers, as the school’s Drama Society sponsor for over a decade, or as a volunteer at a rehabilitation hospital with the newly injured. His character, determination, and perseverance make him a tremendous role model.

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“Today we honor Alan Bronstein, the tenth recipient of the ***Freida J. Riley Teacher Award***,” said Kimberly A. Owens, Chair of the Foundation. “Alan is a prime example of someone who triumphs over adversity by focusing on what he has a passion for – science and teaching. Alan Bronstein is worthy of recognition and most certainly the ***Freida J. Riley Teacher Award***,” said Owens.

Upon learning he had been selected as the recipient of this year’s ***Freida J. Riley Teacher Award***, Alan said “The first thoughts I had were surprise and elation, of course; then gratitude to my nominator and the students who all wrote such wonderful letters for me. While they didn’t stretch the truth, I felt that they put my meager accomplishments in such glowing terms that it was what they wrote, not what I did so much, that got me the honor. Then my mind ran through the stages of my life that brought me to this point: How as a high school student I thought that I might like to return someday to teach chemistry at Central. I did teach for awhile after college, but left it for an exciting business opportunity, only to return to teaching after my spinal cord injury. It seemed to be my destiny – that I was “called” to the profession. . . and the Freida J. Riley Award validates this belief, validates my work, and validates *my life!*” Alan is married with two sons.

The award is named for Freida J. Riley, a math, chemistry and physics teacher at Big Creek High School in Coalwood, WV, during the early space race era of the 1950s and early 60s. During most of her career, Miss Riley taught while suffering from Hodgkin’s disease, until succumbing to the disease at the age of 31. The impact she had on her students is captured in the film ***October Sky***, based on the novel, ***Rocket Boys***, written by her former student, novelist Homer Hickam. Miss Riley inspired her students to dream beyond and overcome the limited opportunities of their era and environment.

Rosalyn Queen Alonso, former Chair of the Foundation Board of Trustees, and Mary C. Queen coordinated the events in Harrison County.

Special guests expected at the dinner include West Virginia First Lady Gayle C. Manchin, Honorary Chair of the event, Iva Riley Dean, sister of Freida J. Riley, and Teresa Loving, the 2008 recipient of the award.

*The Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation is an independent Federal government agency established by Congress in 1992 to “encourage and support research, study and labor designed to produce new discoveries in all fields of endeavor for the benefit of mankind.” Governed by a Presidential-appointed Board of Trustees, the Foundation sponsors **Frontiers of Discovery–Work in Progress and Discover the Future** programs that honor “cutting edge” innovations; innovative ideas of America’s youth; and teachers who dedicate their lives to students despite great personal hardships. For more information, please visit: www.columbusfdn.org or contact Judi Shellenberger at (315) 258-0090.*

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