

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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District 196 teacher wins Inver Hills Alumni of the Year award

Patsy Keech, of South St. Paul, was awarded Inver Hills Community College's Alumni of the Year award at the college's Gala celebration recently.

As Alumni of the Year, Mrs. Keech, spoke at Inver Hills' graduation at Aldrich Arena in St. Paul May 16, telling graduates "The world has been waiting for you for a long time" and challenging them to "Shine on, shine on" with their newfound skills.

Inver Hills, which is entering its 50th year of serving students in the area, annually recognizes outstanding alumni, who include a member of Congress, former state legislators and county commissioners, and award winners in many professional fields.

Keech was a rare awardee, being honored for outstanding service in not one, but two fields. She has won many awards for her teaching, and currently heads an innovative program in Hospitality Management at Eagan High School, where students are finding employment and success in that fast-growing field.

Her other field of service grew out of tragedy. Patsy and her husband, Robb, lost their first son, Derian, to a heart condition at age 2½. Going through many surgeries and spending so much time in hospitals convinced them that families of critically ill children needed more time to be with their ailing sons and daughters, so they founded the Spare Key Foundation.

The foundation has given more than \$3 million to 3,000 families in four states, so parents can afford to take time off work and spend that precious time with their sick children. Mrs. Keech and the foundation have won many awards for the idea, including the coveted "Use Your Life Award" from the Oprah Winfrey Foundation. That came with a \$50,000 grant, which was used to help additional families.

Mrs. Neary ran the foundation for its first few years, and then earned a master's degree and returned to teaching. Others now run the foundation, which continues to assist families facing critical medical needs.

About Inver Hills Community College



MEMBERS OF MINNESOTA STATE

Inver Hills Community College (Inver Hills) is a place where students can get an affordable, high-quality education to launch their college degree in a supportive environment. With an enrollment of more than 5,000 full- and part-time students, the Inver Hills experience is defined by small class sizes and an engaged and active community that prepares students to succeed at a four-year college or to enter the workforce. Founded in 1970, the campus is located in Inver Grove Heights, less than 10 miles from Saint Paul, Minnesota.

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