

# Coon Rapids High School DECA teacher honored for business education efforts

by Connor Cummiskey

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A Coon Rapids High School teacher was recently honored for his 20-year career helping students learn about business and leadership. At the DECA State Career Development Conference in Minneapolis, DECA teacher Blake Bodenburg was surprised to learn he'd won the Honorary Life Membership Award. Founded in 1946, DECA is a program that seeks to prepare "emerging leaders and entrepreneurs in marketing, finance, hospitality and management in high schools and colleges around the globe."

Bodenburg didn't believe it at first when one of his students insisted his name appeared for the award during a brief presentation mishap. While Bodenburg didn't know about the award in advance, his colleagues, parents, wife and even his young son who accompanied him to the conference did, and they kept it secret for the big reveal.

"I would like to thank my family, because many of the lessons that I teach in school are based on the lessons my parents taught my siblings and I,"

Bodenburg said in a statement. "I would also like to thank my fellow DECA advisors, school administration and business department at CRHS for their enduring support of DECA. Lastly, the most important person to the success of all my students is my wife, who allows me to go away on 24-hour kickball fundraisers, five-day international competitions, and a district conference a week before Christmas. Without her support, I wouldn't be able to dedicate so much time and effort into CRHS DECA."

Bodenburg spent his first year in the district at Coon Rapids High School but moved to Anoka High School where he worked as a co-advisor for several years before returning to Coon Rapids. His programming is inspired by Doug Orr, whom he worked with at Anoka High School and Don Martin, who was the previous DECA teacher at Coon Rapids High School, Bodenburg said.

Orr's influence includes a \$400 marketing plan project. Students get a \$400 to design, create and advertise a real product they sell in the school store. Students are graded on the profitability of



DECA teacher Blake Bodenburg holds his Honorary Life Membership Award in front of a board of photos of his students. He received the award at the 2019 DECA State Career Development Conference in Minneapolis. (Photo by Connor Cummiskey)

product. “For example, a project that breaks even would get a C... The kids are really go-getters, and they take a lot of pride and ownership over the products that they create,” Bodenburg said.

From Martin, Bodenburg adopted a class management system where students are broken into eight functional teams, such as a public relations, fashion merchandise, finance team... that they rotate through during the year.

The store is managed by three students hired by Bodenburg for internships. They have to manage and run the store, preparing it to open before school starts each year, and closing it down after they have

graduated. “They get a lot of great skills, because not only do they have to get every product in, they have to order every product, they have to pay it, if they lose an invoice they have to go back and call the company that they got it from,” Bodenburg said.

DECA is a co-curricular activity embedded in Coon Rapids High School’s business and marketing classes, Bodenburg said. Students learn real-world business and leadership skills through activities such as field trips to businesses, job shadowing, and internships. “There shouldn’t ever be a student who leaves my DECA program and says, ‘I don’t know why I learned that, I don’t know what I’m ever going to use that in,’” Bodenburg said. “They are going to be able to use those skills in so many different areas and so many different aspects of their lives.”

The three students running the school store all agreed that DECA had improved their communication skills and made them more confident. “My speaking skills are a lot better, I am a lot more confident in myself, and I know what I want in the future – specifically business analytics,” senior Ellen Leciejewski said.



*From left, Ellen Leciejewski, Sydney Soczek and Ryan Kemp run the Coon Rapids High School store and received state recognition for school-based enterprise at the state DECA conference March 3-5, in Minneapolis. (Photo by Connor Cummiskey)*