

# Lew-Port teacher becomes first from WNY in National Teachers Hall of Fame



Parent Jennie Welder, left, who nominated Lew-Port special education teacher Ashli Dreher for the National Teachers Hall of Fame, calls her “an angel.” (John Hickey/Buffalo News)

- By [Thomas J. Prohaska](#) Published Fri, Mar 31, 2017

LEWISTON - Jennie Welder calls Ashli Dreher an angel. Lewiston-Porter School Superintendent Paul J. Casseri says she's a miracle worker. Dreher, a former New York State teacher of the year, learned Friday she will be inducted into the National Teachers Hall of Fame. She's the first Buffalo Niagara area teacher to gain the honor. "I'm just in shock that I'm actually selected," Dreher said.

Dreher has taught special education at Lew-Port since 1998. She currently works in the high school, teaching a 12-student class. She taught in Franklinville and Amherst before coming to Lew-Port. "I just love it. I can't imagine doing anything else," said Dreher, who attended the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda schools and graduated from Canisius College. "I'm certified as a school district administrator, but I can't see myself leaving the classroom."



"Her programming is very innovative," Casseri said. "She works with our most severely handicapped students, and what she's done is really a miracle, especially in the area of literacy. She's taken kids whose parents were told years ago that they'd never read, and they're reading."

"Ashli has done so many amazing things, there's not words to describe it. Ms. Dreher has such a gift for working with children," said Welder, of Youngstown, who nominated Dreher for the Hall of Fame as well as the 2014 state teacher of the year award.

Welder said her two daughters, Laura and Amy, both went through Dreher's special ed classes. Amy, who graduated last year and is now working as a cleaner at the school, attended Friday's ceremony. "When I started, I wasn't so good with reading, and all of a sudden I moved up so fast," Amy said. "I call her my angel. She's given so much of herself," Welder said.

"That is what great teachers do. They make a difference," said Brett Coppins, president of the Lew-Port United Teachers. "What we try to do is elevate the teaching profession and honor all teachers," said Carol Strickland, executive director of the Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame, located at Emporia State University in Kansas, has inducted five teachers a year since 1992.

This year's class of inductees will be honored at an April 28 gala at the National Education Association headquarters in Washington and formally inducted June 23 in Emporia. Dreher knew she had been nominated – she had to write five essays and submit a video of herself teaching as part of the selection process – but she didn't know she had been chosen until she was summoned to the Lewiston-Porter High School atrium Friday morning.

A nomination packet, [available online](#), starts the process. Nominees must write five essays on specified topics and submit a three-minute video of themselves teaching. The selection panel, which includes past inductees and representatives from teacher unions and other educational organizations, government agencies and the private sector, winnows the field.

Dreher received a master's degree in special education at D'Youville College in 1998 and a certificate of advanced study in educational leadership in 2002 from the University at Buffalo. She is on track to receive a doctorate in teaching and curriculum in May from the University of Rochester.

She lives on Grand Island and is a mother of two daughters.