



LifeSmarts
Learn it. Live it.

Faces of LifeSmarts | Bonnie Baker

LifeSmarts Coach of the Year



Prepping students for a lifetime of smart choices

How one MO teacher keeps her students engaged and prepared to take on life after graduation

Bonnie Baker needed something new to keep her students engaged. Bonnie, a high school teacher in Linn, Missouri, had just started a new year with a new group of students and was looking for something that would liven up the classroom and get her students excited.

“I needed some sort of curriculum that would be not only challenging, but interesting as well,” says Bonnie. LifeSmarts, the quiz show-style educational tool that teaches teens real life skills in a fast-paced, competitive format was just what she was looking for.

“It worked out perfectly. My students liked the competitive aspect of the program and the wide range of subjects, some of which they knew, but some of which they had to really study to master,” explains Bonnie.

LifeSmarts offers lessons in five key areas—personal finance, consumer rights and responsibilities, health and safety, technology, and the environment—with the aim of helping young students build the real-life skills they’ll need to navigate today’s increasingly complex marketplace.

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The fact that LifeSmarts is preparing teens for life after graduation is not lost on the student participants. “LifeSmarts gives the students a real sense of knowing more about their world and enables them to become better citizens,” says Bonnie. “One student remarked that he could understand how LifeSmarts topics would impact his life whereas some of his school subjects wouldn’t be used in his working life.”

2011 marked a special accomplishment for Bonnie’s team members, taking the Missouri state title and making their way to the LifeSmarts National Championship in Hollywood, CA, to test their consumer savvy against teams from across the country—an achievement Bonnie describes as a “tremendous reward for students from Middle America and a town of 1,000 people.”

This year’s Nationals saw the highest participation in LifeSmarts’ history, with 33 state teams vying for the championship title.

“We were so impressed with the whole Nationals experience,” smiles Bonnie. “There was an impressive list of firsts that happened to these kids: first plane ride, first subway ride, first city bus ride, first time at the ocean, and first time in California. It was great being with them and experiencing their excitement and joy. They were just in awe of all the great things they saw and did.”



2011 Missouri state champion team in Los Angeles.

Bonnie has a unique bond and long history with her LifeSmarts team—she has been teaching some of her kids since they were in elementary school! Bonnie was diagnosed with lymphoma in 2008 and, at the time, was teaching some of her LifeSmarts team members when she came back feeling “weak, bald, and barely hanging on.” Her students were there for her, offering encouragement and support. “They were so accepting and happy to see me each week, it helped me in my recovery and my morale,” remembers Bonnie.

The feeling of friendship and support is mutual—at the 2011 event, Bonnie’s students nominated her for national LifeSmarts Coach of the Year. Her students wrote on her nomination form, “She cares about our futures genuinely. She believes that we can change the world and encourages us to do just that. Her hopes for us stretch so much higher than our own. She wants us to be knowledgeable and productive citizens and that’s what LifeSmarts is all about.”

With a nomination like that, it’s no

surprise the Bonnie was named the 2011 Coach of the Year—an honor Bonnie describes as “truly a highlight of my life. I still smile every time I think about it.”

Since this Coach of the Year has been involved with LifeSmarts for several years, she has also been able to see the early impact of the program.

“I often hear my students bring up topics in their general conversation that tells me that the things they’ve learned are impacting their lives,” says Bonnie, proudly. “They talk knowledgeably about finance and the environment so often that it makes me realize that the LifeSmarts knowledge they’ve gained will help them make good life decisions.”

For a program built to help kids make kids make smart consumer choices, you can’t ask for a better endorsement than that. 💧