Pittsfield school board humbled, honored by EDie award

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PITTSFIELD — The New Hampshire School Boards Association chose Pittsfield as the 2013 School Board of Excellence, which will be formally presented at the annual N.H. Excellence in Education Banquet — also known as the “EDies” — in a few weeks.

The award recognizes school boards who encourage and create policies which inspire community involvement, according to NHSBA Executive Director Ted Comstock.

“Pittsfield was particularly outstanding,” Comstock said, adding the board successfully involved students, parents and residents to help shape policy in the community.

School Board Chair Michael Wolfe said the five-member board is humbled and honored to be recognized for their efforts, but “it wasn’t something we’re trying to accomplish.”

While this is the first time the school board has received the award, Wolfe said officials feel they’ve been on the right track in the past few years. “We have a very good relationship with the students, the faculty and the town,” Wolfe said, adding the board tries to get the public involved in every aspect of schools.

Wolfe said they have been very successful working with a student-led committee which proposes activities and ideas — like allowing an open campus — that are not specifically governed by existing policy. For the most part, he said, officials found the students impose tougher standards but are living up to them.

“It’s not very often we go against their policy,” Wolfe said, adding one of the only instances involved allowing boys to wear hats in school.

While the students supported the proposal, Wolfe said the board felt it was not appropriate to
amend the dress code. As a result of their relationship, which was built on mutual respect, he said the students accepted the decision maturely.

The board brought together 20 officials, staffers and residents to help hire a principal. “If you hire right, it makes the job tremendously easy,” Wolfe said.

For the past two years, Wolfe said the board has been reviewing, combining and updating district policies, especially ones that date back to the 1980s or 1990s. He said this was long overdue, especially since officials never considered iPads or cyber bullying when the policies were written a generation ago.

As a result, Wolfe said the district intends to keep up with changing technology and evolving practices.

“We’re going to try to improve,” Wolfe said. “We’re not going to slack off in anyway.”

Comstock said it’s important for residents to feel involved and to know their tax dollars are being used productively.

“As elected representatives, it’s important to remain connected to the community,” he said.

Last year, Comstock said the NHSBA recognized the school board from Fall Mountain Regional — which includes the communities of Acworth, Alstead, Charlestown, Langdon and Walpole — for excellence and the one from Mascenic Regional, serving Greenville and New Ipswich, in 2011.

“A lot of work school boards do goes unnoticed,” Comstock said, adding there are 175 school boards in the state which are members of the association. As a result, Comstock said the EDies, which recognize the top leaders in about 40 different educational associations, are a big deal.

“It’s sort of like the Academy Awards for education in the state,” Comstock said, adding about 700 educators and officials attend the event each year.

The banquet is scheduled for June 8 at 4 p.m. at the Raddison Hotel, Center of NH, 700 Elm St. in Manchester. The cost to attend is $40 per person or $400 per table. As this is the 20th
anniversary of the event, formal attire is encouraged, according to www.edies.org.

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