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MSU starts new year with awards for excellence

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Montana State University President Waded Cruzado celebrated the start of a new year Tuesday by presenting awards to 21 outstanding professors and staff members and announcing major events planned for 2015.

Cruzado said she started the Spring Convocation tradition four years ago to honor MSU's "inspirational" faculty and staff for excellence in teaching, outreach, research and creativity.

She said she was proud to announce that Rebecca Skloot, author of "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks," will speak at the Freshman Convocation on Aug. 26. Next fall's incoming freshmen will be asked to read the bestseller, which tells how science used a black woman's cell line for medical research. It raises important issues about ethics, diversity and scientific research and is a "mesmerizing" read, Cruzado said.

Sherman Alexie, the popular Native American author, will speak at MSU on March 28. The film "Winter in the Blood," based on the James Welch novel, will be shown the next day.

And Jabs Hall, the new \$20-million College of Business building, will open this spring.

"This is indeed a very exciting time at Montana State," Cruzado said, adding that students and professors are winning more national and international honors than ever before.

Many of Tuesday's awards included monetary prizes of up to \$2,500.

Cruzado presented Ada Giusti, who teaches French language, a teaching excellence award. For many years Giusti has brought her students to small villages in Africa, from Mali to Morocco, to teach French and computer literacy. One of her students wrote, "Dr. Giusti changed my life. She has encouraged me to travel the world, serve others and have an academic practice grounded in not only holistic thought, but in love."

Giusti said she is awestruck by the compassion her students show. "I love teaching every year, every day," she said.

Cruzado presented Julie Ruff of the Nursing College with the service-learning award. Ruff leads nursing students twice a year to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, where they give well-child exams and provide home care to families and elders. Ruff thanked her dean for allowing her to "pursue my passion."

Provost Martha Potvin gave Thomas McNab of the School of Architecture an undergraduate mentoring award. As director of the Community Design Center, McNab has traveled 10,000 miles throughout the state to meet with Montana communities that want MSU students' help to solve building problems.

David Weaver received a research award from Renee Reijo Pera, research vice president, for his work fighting noxious weeds and agricultural pests, like wheat stem sawfly, which costs Montana up to \$80 million a year.

Reijo Pera honored Joseph Shaw, head of the OPTEC Center, for scientific discoveries likely to be used by private businesses.

Other awards went to Coleen Kaiser for developing internships in dietetics around the state; Stephanie Gray for working with industry to develop workforce training at Gallatin College; and Bill McLaughlin for training teachers on Indian reservations in teaching science.

See a complete list of awards from MSU

Honors went to Betsy Danforth at the Women's Center for fighting sexual assault and discrimination; Bonita Kramer for outstanding teaching in accounting; and Brent Rosso for innovative teaching in business, like the 60-second elevator pitch students must make to investors.

Ann Bertagnolli at Montana INBRE and Abigail Richards in chemistry were honored for promoting the "spirit of discovery" in students. Scott Powell in land resources and environment won for innovations in online teaching. Linda Young, political science department chair, was recognized for mentoring women faculty.

Scientist Bern Kohler was honored for his discoveries, including the damaging impact of ultraviolet light in skin cancer. Mentoring awards went to Rita Sand, for her advising and support for Native American students; to historian Mary Murphy for inspiring students; and Bill Inskip for mentoring graduate students.

Brock LaMeres in electrical and computer engineering won for excellence in teaching freshmen and sophomores. Ariel Donohue of the Diversity Awareness Office was honored for promoting the status of women at MSU.