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Teacher of the year recalls Obama's words

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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WESTHAMPTON - After talking with President Barack Obama early in the summer, Anthony J. Muller, national teacher of the year, keeps this in mind: The president credits his schoolteachers for bringing him to where he is now, in the oval office.

Mullen, a special education teacher in Connecticut, conversed with the 44th president at the White House before accepting his Teacher of the Year award. He related the experience recently to Hampshire Regional School District staff.

"The president turned around and said, 'You know Tony, this is my first speech in the Rose Garden,' " said Mullen, who had not been to the White House since 1968 when his parents took photos of him in front of it during a family trip.

"I told him, 'Well, if it's any consolation, this is my first speech in the Rose Garden, too, and I'm going after you,'" Mullen said, prompting laughter among the audience in the Hampshire Regional Middle High School auditorium.

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CAROL LOLLIS

Hampshire Regional School Assistant Superintendent Tony Ryan stands with teachers and staff who have been with the district for 10 years or more.



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At the awards ceremony, Obama told guests the nation doesn't do enough to honor its teachers, who go to work for so much more than a paycheck. He said the greatest barometer for success is a student's educational background.

Mullen, of Greenwich, Conn., told Hampshire Regional teachers that it takes passion, perseverance

and professionalism to be a good educator. He said he could "feel it in the room" that Hampshire Regional teachers are good at their jobs.

New School Superintendent Craig Jurgensen and 2008 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year Michael Flynn also spoke at the convocation last Tuesday, which kicked off the new school year. Flynn returns this year to his second-grade classroom at the William E. Norris Elementary School in Southampton after a year of being a teacher-in-residence at Westfield State College.

Mullen received a standing ovation at the conclusion of his keynote address from Hampshire Regional administrators, teachers and staff.

A retired New York City police captain, Mullen now teaches at the Arch School, of Greenwich, Conn. The Council of Chief State School Officers names the teacher of the year.

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