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Teacher honored as patriot

Veterans award after flag dispute

By Robert Cohen
Patriot Ledger Staff

RANDOLPH — Randolph veterans last night gave their Americanism award to Jean Noblin, the high school teacher who suggested that a student should stand when the *Star Spangled Banner* was played.

"I see it as a gesture of support from the community, which I really appreciate," said an obviously pleased Noblin. "I have a love affair with this town."

James Campbell of the town's VFW said, "Mrs. Noblin has been teaching patriotism in our schools for a long time. It became a very public issue earlier this year. But she stood firm on her stand that the flag was an important symbol of our country and it deserved the proper respect."

Harold Jensen, chairman of the Randolph Veterans Council, said veterans were thanking Noblin for publicly advocating respect for the flag. "We didn't want to see her name besmirched when she stood up for the flag," he said. "We fully, fully appreciate this."

Bill Ruprecht, president of Randolph Amvets, said, "It's no disgrace for anybody, whether they stand up for the crucifix, the Star of David or the American Flag. It's no disgrace, it's something to be proud of."

The award, plus a dozen red roses and a framed poem extolling the virtues of saluting the flag, were intended as a vote of confidence in Noblin for her role in the controversy over Susan Shapiro.

Shapiro is the 17-year-old girl who triggered national attention when she refused to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and the *Star Spangled Banner*. She charged Noblin with harassing her and

'I pledge allegiance to the flag ...'



Randolph teacher Jean Noblin holds her Americanism award.

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making an anti-Semitic remark.

Noblin, a Randolph English teacher for 30 years, said she was bothered by Shapiro's lack of respect for the flag, and quietly questioned her reasons for sitting, but denied harassing the girl or saying anything anti-Semitic.

Noblin accepted the award in front of a large American flag pinned on the wall behind her. As she approached the front of the room, she was greeted with a standing ovation from the 60 veterans representing the town's five veterans groups — American Legion,

Amvets, Disabled Veterans (DAV), VFW and the Jewish War Veterans.

The Americanism Award praising patriotism has been awarded before, Jensen said, but Noblin is the first recipient in recent memory.

Noblin describes herself as an

"army brat" whose father, a career officer, served in both World Wars. She served in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) during the Second World War and said she has felt a strong patriotism since her childhood, when she would stand at (Please see AWARD, Page 15)

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attention and salute while her father played the national anthem on the piano.

Selectmen Chairman Maureen Dunn and Vice Chairman Gail Bowers attended the ceremony at the Amvets Post.

Noblin came to the tribute, which began with a dinner, with her two sons and their wives. The veterans groups also held their annual elections and installation of officers at the gathering.

The proceedings opened with a resounding recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Shapiro's charges against Noblin touched off a wellspring of support for the popular Randolph teacher.

Students came to school with small American flags and high school teachers signed a letter of support. Noblin said last night that former students and friends from across the country that she hasn't spoken with for years responded with sympathetic letters.

Though Noblin has been defended in town, some outsiders have suggested that her handling of the situation was improper.

Harvard Professor Alan Dershowitz, a civil liberties expert who has agreed to serve as a lawyer for the Shapiros, said the girl has a constitutional right not to stand and that Noblin should not have made any comments trying to convince her to do otherwise.

During the controversy, which drew national media attention, the Shapiro family reported receiving anti-Semitic phone calls, critical letters and death threats. The girl stayed home from school for more than 10 days until a security plan could be worked out with school administrators and officials from the Justice Department's community relations division, who agreed to help unfuse tensions.

Randolph School Superintendent John Zoino said yesterday that Shapiro has returned to school on a regular basis. "Things are very quiet and operating in a normal fashion," he said. He refused to talk further about the case, citing an agreement with the family not to speak with the

press, in an effort to tone down the situation.

However, a close observer of events at the school, said there was a recent dispute between the family and the school authorities.

The girl was assigned detention for coming late to class several times, but the family complained that she was unfairly being singled out, the source said.

Zoino held a two-hour meeting with the family to discuss the matter this week and has not yet decided whether she will have to take the detention.

Shapiro, a senior who wants to attend beauty school after graduation, will be allowed to graduate, despite missing a large number of school days while officials made security arrangements.

The police officer that had been accompanying her to class as part of a security plan stopped his patrols this week, the observer said.