

Top of the class

Star Internet Awards
Thatcher, Colina, Knolls
Web sites take top honors



Web-savvy winners
Local schools' Web sites honored by Star — B1



VENTURA COUNTY STAR

By Roger Harris
Staff writer

Thatcher School in Ojai, Colina Middle School in Thousand Oaks and Knolls School in Simi Valley have been selected as winners of the first Star Internet Awards for local school Web sites.

Twenty-two public and private schools in the Ventura County area submitted entries in high school, middle school and elementary school categories.

Second-place winners were Camarillo High School, Pinecrest Middle in Thousand Oaks and Citrus Glen in Ventura.

Third-place awards went to Moorpark High School, Isbell Middle in Santa Paula and Bedford Open in Camarillo.

The winning Web sites were selected based on creativity and customization, ease of use, interactivity, student involvement and depth and timeliness of information.

The awards were judged by the staffs of the InsideVC.com, the Ventura County Star's Internet portal, and the Star's Fast Forward section.

Thacher, a private co-educational boarding school, won the top spot in the high school category with a comprehensive and impressive use of Web technology to communicate effectively with students, parents, staff and alumni, according to the judges.

Among other things, Thacher has posted on its Web site MP3 files of student's musical work, built a searchable calendar and offers a variety of informational pages designed specifically for parents and alumni.

"The site is very polished and sophisticated,"

GOING HIGH TECH: Students, above from right, Denice Grandchamp, 10; Duggan, 11; and Torey Pudwell, 10, use computers at Knolls School in Thousand Oaks. Below, Sam Kane, Colina Middle School webmaster in Thousand Oaks, Ramesh, 11, to work on the Web site. Both schools won Star Internet Awards.



said Stephen Dana, director of New Media for the Ventura County Star. "It has an almost professional feel with great detail and timely information."

"Technology is a year-round thing here," said Bert Mahoney, Thacher's director of Digital Media. "In terms of the Web site and deciding what technologies to use we didn't put a limit on

what's possible. Instead, we said, 'Let's see what we can do.'"

The Camarillo and Moorpark schools were cited for their use of student interactivity and ease of

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Continued from D1

Camarillo High's site, for instance, includes a database of available college scholarships with details on qualifying criteria and how to apply. The Moorpark High site includes a detailed "Tutorials" section that offers links to Web sites devoted to various academic disciplines.

In the middle school category, Colina's Web site took first place based in part on its use of animation and graphics and student involvement with the site.

"The depth and breadth of Colina's information and the freshness of its content is impressive," Dana said.

Pinecrest Schools, a private independent school that offers preschool through middle school classes, was recognized for its creative use of graphics and posting a variety of student work such as detailed maps created for a sixth-grade cartography project.

Isbell Middle School's Web site was cited for its easy navigation

activities.

In the elementary category, Knolls' Web site was recognized among other features, development of classroom Web pages and student interaction.

Citrus Glen was recognized for the variety of school-related information posted on its Web site, including extras such as PTA newsletters and a sound file of the school song.

Bedford Open's use of Web technology and a detailed menu of school information helped land it among the three elementary school Web sites.

One feature shared by all of the winning Web sites as well as virtually all of the contest entries is an effort to use the Web to enhance communication between the school, parents and the community at large.

"It's the most powerful communication tool we could devise," Sam Kane, Colina Middle School counselor and webmaster. "Some of our parents have labeled it a lifesaver, a godsend, a solver of all ailments about what is homework."

teachers to use the school Web site post homework assignments and display student work.

"It's a boarding school, so as far as the Web has proved to be a clearly useful means of staying in touch with parents, alumni and anyone else."

By summer the school plans a software upgrade that would deliver customized content to parents.

"The idea is to have a parent log

in and the system will know who they are and select the items they are most interested in," Mahoney said.

Student involvement is another important element in developing a comprehensive school Web site. Knolls, for example, has a "Student Council Page" and a "Kids K Connect" page that lets students at all grade levels interact with their

peers.

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