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FRED ROGERS CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RITA CATALANO RECEIVES SVC AWARD RECOGNIZING CREATIVE INITIATIVES

LATROBE, PA – Rita Catalano, executive director of the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media, was named the third annual winner of Saint Vincent College’s *Projektenmacher* Award in recognition of her creative initiatives that, in the spirit of Saint Vincent founder Boniface Wimmer, “have made a valuable difference to the campus community through creativity, imagination and vision.” The award was presented by Saint Vincent College President Br. Norman W. Hipps, O.S.B., during the Founders’ Day Honors Convocation on Nov. 14 in the Saint Vincent Basilica.

Four years ago on Founders’ Day, Br. Norman announced his intention to begin honoring a member of the Saint Vincent College community annually with a *Projektenmacher* Award. “Boniface Wimmer’s fellow monks were derisive of his vision for a mission to America, and even nicknamed him, ‘*Der Projektenmacher*, that big plan-maker! That dreamer!’,” Br. Norman commented. “But at the end of Wimmer’s life, after 40 years of extraordinary accomplishments in America, *Projektenmacher* came to identify an individual who got things done.”

“Today we celebrate the work and successes of Rita Catalano,” Br. Norman said in making the presentation. “Rita was hired to be a grants writer but she had an amazing capacity to take ideas partially thought out and often disconnected and shape them into a proposal that had coherence with clear objectives, strategies, a reasonable budget and most importantly – was fundable. There was a U.S. Department of Education Title III program which was intended to strengthen

institutions of higher education. Not only did Rita effectively prepare the proposal, she served as the coordinator. While there were several pieces, it was this grant that allowed us to begin master's programs in education and business and undertake other initiatives.”

“The National Science Foundation had a program that was intended to support cooperative work among industries, school districts and higher education, and together with representatives from these three areas, Rita crafted an NSF proposal that resulted in a project called BRIDGES,” Br. Norman related. “It supported the development of modules that were used in local school districts. This project, along with other grant-funded projects, enabled us to be part of the larger Math Science Partnership which connects 50 school districts and four institutions of higher education.”

“For the last 10 years, Rita has been at the center of our Fred Rogers Center,” Br. Norman continued. “Former president Jim Will asked her to move to the administration of this new endeavor where she worked first with executive directors Bill Isler and Max King before she herself assumed that role. In that period of time we built the facility, created a national advisory council formerly chaired by the executive director of the George Lucas Foundation and currently by the Dean and CEO of Northwestern University Qatar, established the new position of Associate Professor of Early Learning and Children’s Media, and created several national signature programs and initiatives.”

Since 2009, the Early Career Fellows program has supported educators, artists, technologists, and others who carry forward the legacy of Fred Rogers in their own original projects that have included videos, music, educational materials for young children, and mobile apps which have been recognized by Common Sense Media, *USA Today*, and iPad Apps for Kids.

The Fred Rogers Center Early Learning Environment™ (*Ele*) is a web platform of digital resources to support early literacy. *Ele* has been cited for its innovative approach by the American Library Association’s Great Web Site for Kids, the Parents’ Choice Foundation blog, and the “Pioneering Literacy” report of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

In 2012, in partnership with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Rogers Center issued the national position statement, *Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Program Serving Children Birth through Age 8*.

The Rogers Center is one of the lead organizations in the Alliance for Early Learning in a Digital Age, along with the TEC Center at Erikson Institute, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, PBS and Sesame Workshop and the Joan Ganz Cooney Center. The Alliance’s activity has included a recent research roundtable in partnership with the New America Foundation in Washington, D.C.

“When we looked to replace Rita as director in anticipation of her planned retirement in December, we had applications that came with experience of working with Jim Henson and the Muppets, service as vice president of global education for Sesame Street, and executive director for Turner International Asia Pacific and Emmy-winning director of *Bear in the Big Blue House*,” Br. Norman said. “Rita, thank you for your smart, dedicated, attentive-to-detail

leadership that has made things happen; the grantsmanship followed by careful implementation; and now the nationally recognized Rogers Center.”

Catalano and her husband, Carl, live in Penn Township. They have a married daughter, Jennifer Filak, who lives in Forest Hills with her husband, Kevin, and son, William. Rita is a member of St. Barbara Church in Harrison City.

Photo: Br. Norman W. Hipps, O.S.B., right, president of Saint Vincent College, presented the *Projektenmacher* Award to Rita Catalano, left, recognizing her creative initiative inspired by founder Boniface Wimmer.

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