

Facts About the WV Golden Horseshoe Award

The Golden Horseshoe originated in the early 1700s in colonial Virginia when then-Governor Alexander Spotswood saw the need for exploration of the land west of the Allegheny Mountains, most of which is now West Virginia. The governor organized a party of about 50 men to explore the frontier. At the end of the exploration, he presented each member of the party with a golden horseshoe. Translated from Latin, the inscription on each horseshoe read, "Thus it was decided to cross the mountains." On the other side was written, "Order of the Golden Horseshoe." Because of this, the recipients became known as "The Knights of the Golden Horseshoe."

The Golden Horseshoe is probably the most coveted award bestowed upon West Virginia students each year. During the induction ceremony, students kneel and the State Superintendent, using an antique sword, dubs students as "ladies" or "knights" of the Golden Horseshoe.

The Golden Horseshoe Test has been administered in West Virginia since 1931 and is the longest-running program of its kind in any state.

Two hundred twenty-one West Virginia eighth graders receive the award each year. The two top-scoring students from each county are given the award (total of 110), as are another 110 students selected throughout the state based on population. In addition, the top-scoring student from the West Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind is presented the award.

Recipients during the past seven decades include citizens from all walks of life, state Supreme Court justices, legislators, attorneys, business leaders and educators.

In conversations with Department of Education officials, West Virginia native Homer Hickam indicated that his one regret was not winning the Golden Horseshoe award as a student. The author of "October Sky" was presented an honorary Golden Horseshoe award in 1999 because of all the positive reinforcement he has given the state.