Montgomery, Ala. - Seven public relations practitioners from the state of Alabama will share a highly-coveted national award, for a project unlike any other in the award’s 35-year history. The Alabama School Public Relations Association (ALSPRA) has won a prestigious Gold Medallion from the National School Public Relations Association.

The win is credited to ALSPRA President Lesley Bruinton, APR (Tuscaloosa City Schools); Secretary-Treasurer Malissa Valdes-Hubert, APR (Alabama State Department of Education); Vice President Elect of Professional Development Cindy Warner, APR (Shelby County Schools); Nez Calhoun, APR (Jefferson County Board of Education); Jason Gaston, APR (Hoover City Schools); Denise Berkhalter, APR (Alabama Association of School Boards) and Kenon A. Brown, PhD (The University of Alabama).

NSPRA’s Gold Medallion Award is the top award recognizing superior education public relations programs, projects and campaigns in North America and is the only national awards competition that specifically recognizes comprehensive, strategic school public relations programs. According to NSPRA officials, the organization is the only NSPRA chapter whose program has gained this recognition since the award was established in 1981.

Bruinton said this was an opportunity to lend the expertise of the organization to others. “Not all schools and school system have someone on staff to handle PR,” said Bruinton. “But all do have the need for building strong stakeholder relationships. Our PLU offers a customizable approach to meeting those needs.”

Selected as one of only seven winners in a highly-competitive 2016 field, ALSPRA partnered with Brown, an assistant professor of public relations, to develop a state-approved Professional Learning Unit, or PLU, to address the Alabama Council for Leadership Development’s Standard 5: Community and Stakeholder Relationships. The purpose of the PLU was to teach school leaders to develop their own strategic communication plans. These state-approved PLUs are part of the criteria necessary for educators to maintain their certifications.
“Throughout this year, I have been proud to partner with ALSPRA for this project,” said Brown. “To say that we took school professionals from teachers, to principals and superintendents and taught them how to create a realistic communication plan for their needs is an amazing accomplishment.

Twelve participants completed the first cohort, including two superintendents, each seeking to address an issue in their respective communities with a strategic communication plan. During the six-month professional study, participants were paired with mentors from ALSPRA who hold the Accreditation in Public Relations to offer suggestions to the plans. The second cohort of this program will start in the fall.

The Gold Medallion Awards will be presented at the NSPRA National Seminar in Chicago, Illinois this summer. ALSPRA’s efforts also garnered a Mark of Distinction as an Exemplary Chapter from the National School Public Relations Association. To learn more, contact alabamaschoolpr@gmail.com

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