Teacher of year cites alma mater’s high standards

Kean University

UNION — Lauren Marrocco didn’t hesitate when she was asked about her most memorable experience at Kean University.

“It was my junior field work,” she said recently. “That’s what connected me to Perth Amboy.”

And that connection was fortuitous, not only for Marrocco but also for the scores of children from Perth Amboy’s E.J. Patten elementary school who have spent a year in her fourth-grade classroom.

Gov. Chris Christie recently named Marrocco, a double graduate of Kean University (B.A. in elementary education; M.A. in educational supervision), the state’s 2012-’13 Teacher of the Year. To hear Marrocco tell it, she still can’t believe she’s been singled out for such an honor.

“It has been an incredible journey,” she said. “It’s been great, but I really see myself as a reflection of every other excellent educator I know and work with.”

Marrocco began that journey at Kean more than a decade ago. She knew she wanted to be a teacher, but it was her experience in the field that not only confirmed her commitment to education, but inspired a passion to teach in the urban district of Perth Amboy.

“As much as you learn from books and other content, the field experience is where you really learn practical lessons,” she said. “Kean allowed me to get that experience.” She was so satisfied with her undergraduate experience that she returned to Kean for her graduate degree.

Now, when she meets new colleagues from Kean, she’s delighted to welcome them.

“I know from experience that Kean has high standards for their educators,” she said. “So I get super-excited when I meet new teachers who are from Kean.”

Marrocco’s selection as teacher of the year was the culmination of a highly selective process at the school, district, county and state level. “Every time I took another step up the ladder, it was a complete shock to me,” she said. “I mean, I met other teachers of the year at the district and county level, and they were all fantastic.”