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Bers receives presidential award

Thursday, August 3, 2006

Marina Bers of Arlington went to the White House recently to receive a 2005 Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers from President George W. Bush.

This award is the highest honor given by the government to outstanding scientists and engineers at the early stages of their careers.

Bers was nominated to receive this honor by the National Science Foundation, which had earlier given her an NSF Career Award for her work titled "Community of Learning and Care: Multi-user Environments that Promote Positive Youth Development." This study evolved from her PhD thesis at MIT's Media Lab.

It has been successfully applied to various young student groups in schools and after-school settings where the children were able to expand their thinking on subjects such as family and community identity, values, fairness and other important issues confronting young people today.

Bers has also used her technologies and conducted studies at The Children's Hospital in Boston. There, young patients on kidney dialysis were drawn out of their isolation by participating in these virtual environments on bedside computers. They were thus able to develop their virtual identities, icons, values, hopes - all with privacy, yet with the potential to let them communicate with fellow patients, nurses, parents or doctors. She is currently expanding this work with children who have received organ transplants.






She was born and brought up in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She came to the U.S. in 1994 to attend Boston University, and then the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 2001, she also became a U.S. citizen. She is now an assistant professor at the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University, and an adjunct professor at the Department of Computer Science there.

She juggles her career with the demands of raising three children, ages 6, 3-1/2 and 1-1/2. Her husband, Joshua Bers, has been a resident of Arlington since birth. Her mother, Lydia Umaschi, who was widowed in 2001, also lives in Arlington, and her in-laws, Anita and Abe Bers, have lived there since 1970.

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