

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Village of Gurnee Honors 2019 Teachers of the Year Recipients

GURNEE, IL – The annual Teacher of the Year Award Ceremony for teachers in Districts 50, 56 and 121 will be held on Monday, May 6th at Gurnee Village Hall (325 N. O'Plaine Road) as part of the Village Board's regular meeting beginning at 7:00 p.m. Mayor Kristina Kovarik and the Village Board, in conjunction with Superintendents Dr. Joy Swoboda of Woodland District 50, Dr. Colleen Pacatte of Gurnee School District 56 and Dr. John Ahlgrim of Warren Township High School District 121, will recognize the 2019 Teachers of the Year from each of the respective Gurnee-area school districts.

These annual awards were created through the collaboration of the Village, school districts and local business owner Donald Henderson under the leadership of Village Trustee Tom Hood. The awards recognize the distinguished accomplishments of a peer-nominated recipient from each district in service to their students, schools and school district. The 2019 winners are Mrs. Vianey Soriaga (District 50), Mrs. Kathy Kibitlewski (District 56) and Mr. Jason Jecmen (District 121).

Mrs. Soriaga started at Woodland as a classroom kindergarten teacher, followed by teaching English as a second language, bilingual first grade, Spanish dual first grade and now teaching reading recovery, which means she works with simultaneous bilingual students by helping them accelerate their literacy in both languages. The daughter of parents who were both teachers, Mrs. Soriaga's passion for teaching began when she lived in Mexico. She attended Vocacional High School Centro Regional de Educacion Normal and received a bachelor's degree in early childhood from Universidad Pedagogica Nacional in Iguala in Guerrero, Mexico. She also has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from National Louis University and is reading recovery certified.

Elementary West Principal Ryan Wollberg said, "I am proud to say that I get to work with such an outstanding educator as Vianey. She comes to work on a daily basis and does all that she can for our students and staff to ensure we are meeting the needs of all of our learners. She has a positive demeanor that is infectious and after working with Vianey, you can't help but feel that you can accomplish anything. I am so happy for her to have received this recognition, she truly has earned it."

Mrs. Kibitlewski has been an employee of Gurnee School District 56 for 28 years. She is currently the librarian at Prairie Trail School and had previously been a classroom teacher at O'Plaine School. Kathy is the lynchpin to bringing the whole school together with special events such as Reading Counts Assemblies where she helps to provide skits, dances and movies celebrating the accomplishments of the

teachers and students at Prairie Trail School. Kathy has been an important participant with the breakfast program, PBIS program, Parent Engagement Committee, School Improvement Team and the Instructional Leadership Program. Kathy has taken on the role of a mentor for new teachers to the district, helping to support them during the beginnings of this very important career. Kathy Kibitlewski impacts the culture and climate of Prairie Trail School and Gurnee School District 56 with her positive, “can-do” attitude that is a model for any staff member seeking to be their best.

Prairie Trail School Principal Mr. Kevin Simmons said, “Kathy, epitomizes, inspires, and supports the creativity, passion, and perseverance that is so highly desired and so essential to the success of any school staff, or student body.”

Mr. Jecmen has been teaching at Warren Township High School for 25 years, and has been in education for 28 years. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and English from Eastern Illinois University, and a Master’s Degree from National Louis University in Education Leadership. Mr. Jecmen says his years at Warren have been extremely fulfilling and rewarding. “I have had the privilege to work with hundreds of outstanding educators whom I have learned a great deal from. Being a teacher means standing on the shoulders of others, and I am extremely fortunate to stand on the shoulders of both past and current teachers at WTHS.”

District 121 Superintendent Dr. Ahlgrim said, “Jason is truly a special individual who has committed so much to WTHS. His contributions as a teacher, coach, leader and colleague have been, and continue to be remarkable. Most important, Jason is an authentic, first class person and role model, and we are so proud of his selection as our Teacher of the Year for 2019.”

Regarding the awards, Trustee Tom Hood said, “The Village is proud of each school district in town and desires to support our schools in real and meaningful ways. Providing a forum in which each District can put forward a teacher that embodies their efforts in providing a quality education to the young people in our Village is just one way in which we can support our school districts’ efforts.”

The awards will be presented by Mayor Kovarik, Trustee Tom Hood, the Henderson Foundation, and representatives from each school district. In addition to the plaque recognizing their achievement, each teacher will receive a monetary contribution from the Henderson Foundation.

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