

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Village of Gurnee Honors 2025 Teachers and Staff Members of the Year

GURNEE, IL – The Village of Gurnee is proud to announce the 2025 Gurnee Teacher of the Year Award Recipients: Diana Alcala (Warren Township High School District 121), Ricardo Gómez Pimentel (Woodland District 50), and Ilene Kile (Gurnee District 56).

In addition to the Teacher of the Year Awards, the 2025 Staff Member of the Year Award Recipients: Omar Garcia (Warren Township High School District 121), Amanda Medina (Woodland District 50), and Danielle Bonngard (Gurnee District 56).

These prestigious awards are a testament to the collaborative efforts of the Village, local school districts, and late business owner Donald Henderson, under the leadership of Mayor Tom Hood. These awards recognize the outstanding achievements of peer-nominated recipients from each district for their exceptional service to students, schools, and the community.

Ms. Diana Alcala has served in education for 33 years and has been with Warren Township High School since 2004. As a social worker, she has supported students by collaborating with staff, families, and community partners to ensure access to resources. “In my role as a school social worker, it has been important to me that I provide a safe and trusting environment where every student feels valued, heard, and supported,” said Ms. Alcala.

Diana is praised by Superintendent Dr. Danny Woestman as “an exceptional resource for our students,” while Associate Principal Dr. Laura Kirk noted her vast knowledge of community resources and proactive engagement with external partners. Alcala holds a bachelor’s degree in Social Welfare and a master’s degree in Social Work and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Illinois.

Ricardo Gómez Pimentel is a 4th Grade Dual Language Spanish Teacher at Woodland Intermediate. Originally from Spain, he joined Woodland in 2019 as a Visiting International Teacher. With over two decades of teaching experience, Gómez is known for creating a safe, engaging, and motivational classroom.

Gómez credits his success to his students and his Dual Language team, especially Mrs. Wojdyla and Mrs. Rubio. “If I am being recognized for Teacher of the Year, it is because of how strong the team is,” he said. Mr. Gómez is known for his humor, creativity, and deep dedication to

students and families.

Ilene Kile, Prairie Trail's 4th Grade Resource Teacher, is retiring this year after more than 30 years in education, 28 of them with Gurnee District 56. She is known for building strong relationships with students and staff, running Prairie Trail's American Girl Club, and organizing staff events.

Despite retiring, Ilene continues to model lifelong learning. "She has a relentless belief in her students' abilities and potential," noted colleagues. Her contributions have brought joy and hope to the school community throughout her distinguished career.

Omar Garcia, Warren Township High School's 2025 Support Staff of the Year, has been with the district since 2008. His responsibilities include maintaining facilities, supporting events, and assisting staff with a positive attitude. He is described as reliable, hardworking, and a valued team member.

"Omar exemplifies dedication, kindness, and a genuine commitment to helping others," said Almond Campus Mathematics Teacher Mary Storvik. "His contributions make our workplace a better and brighter environment for all."

Amanda Medina, Woodland District 50's 2025 Support Staff of the Year, began her career as a bus driver and is now a Dispatcher in the Transportation Department. Known for her reliability and inclusivity, Amanda bridges communication gaps for Spanish-speaking families and steps in to drive routes when needed.

Amanda credits her team's collaboration and spirit for the award, saying, "This reflects the hard work of an amazing group of people in our department."

Danielle Bonngard, a 1:1 Special Education Aide at Prairie Trail School, is celebrated for her heart, humor, and high expectations. Her impact in just one year has been profound, providing academic, social, and functional growth to students. She is known for going above and beyond, from classroom assistance to building strong relationships with students and staff.

"Her presence ensures every student she encounters feels seen, supported, and capable of success," staff noted. Her positivity has made Prairie Trail a better place each day.

Regarding the awards, Mayor Tom Hood said, "This annual event honors these outstanding educators and their ongoing commitment to our community. Now in its remarkable 11th year, personally it has been a joy to witness, and I'm proud of how our schools seize the opportunity to spotlight educators and now staff members who have truly excelled, setting a standard for their peers to aspire to."

Mayor Tom Hood, Dave Henderson of the Henderson Foundation, and each school district's corresponding representatives were present at the Monday, May 5th Village Board meeting to award the winners. In addition to a plaque recognizing their achievement, each teacher and staff member was given a monetary contribution from the Henderson Foundation.

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